

# DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRODUCTION OF LEATHER PRODUCTS AS ONE OF THE DIRECTIONS OF DIVERSIFICATION OF AZERBAIJAN'S ECONOMY

## POLICY PAPER



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**DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRODUCTION OF LEATHER  
PRODUCTS AS ONE OF THE DIRECTIONS OF  
DIVERSIFICATION OF AZERBAIJAN'S ECONOMY**

**Policy Paper**

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## 2. Introduction

The experience of the countries of the world shows that the diversification of the country's economy is an important factor affecting its dynamic development, strengthening, and ensuring its stability. Azerbaijan is currently one of the countries, the economy of which depends on resource income and which is experiencing the problem of diversification. Starting from the 2010s, the goal of diversifying the economy is mentioned among the main goals of various state programs. In particular, the main goal of the "Azerbaijan 2020: Look into the Future" Development Concept, signed in December 2012, was the issue of economic diversification.

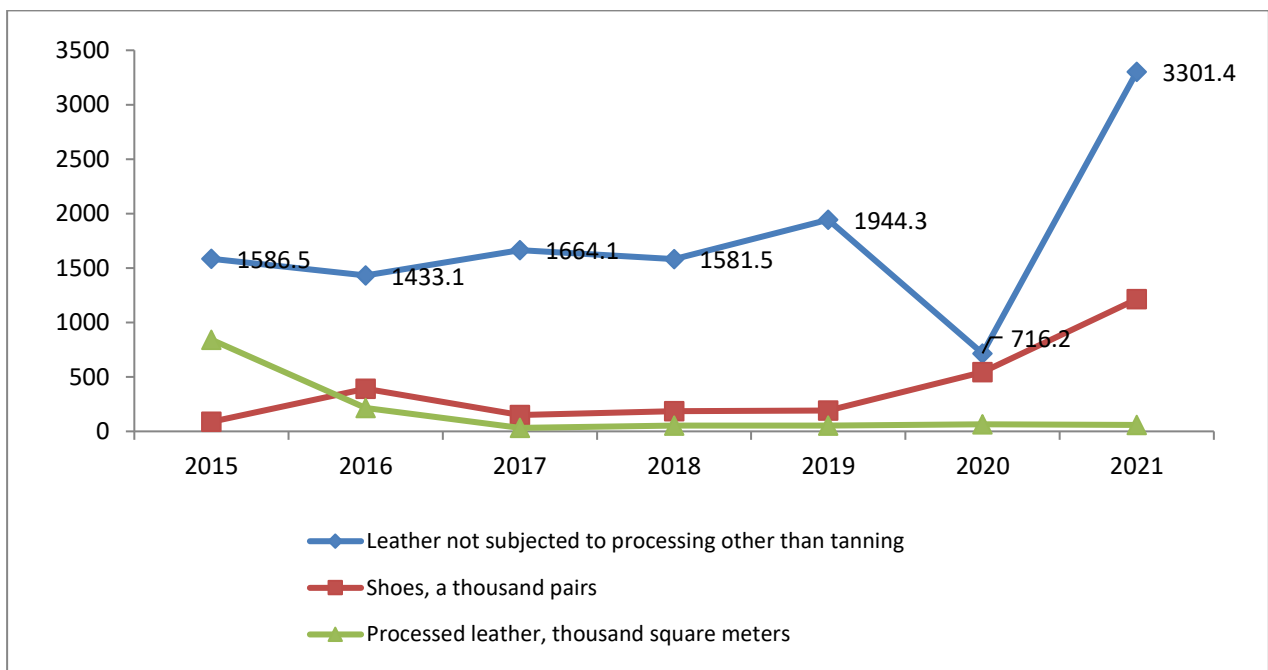
After that, the Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated March 16, 2016, "The Main Directions of the Strategic Roadmap of the National Economy and the Main Sectors of the Economy" was approved. With that Order, the main selected economic sectors for the diversification of the country's economy were also determined, and the strategic roadmaps for the development of those sectors were approved. The first of the five National Priorities in the document "Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development" approved by the Order of the President of the country dated February 2, 2021, is defined as a "sustainably growing competitive economy". To achieve this priority, diversification of the country's economy, development of different production areas in the non-oil and gas sector, and increase in the production of competitive products should be ensured. In the "Socio-Economic Development Strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2022–2026" (approved by the Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated July 22, 2022), it was emphasized that the provision of "sustainable and high economic growth" in the country can be achieved "at the expense of diversification of the country's economy and increase of non-oil exports".

This article examines the field of the production of leather goods as one of the areas with potential opportunities for the diversification of the economy of Azerbaijan. Within the framework of the study, an attempt was made to study the state of development of this production area in our country, to reveal the existing potential opportunities for its further development, and to determine the policy steps necessary to implement such opportunities.

### 3. The modern state of the production of leather goods in Azerbaijan

When talking about the development of the non-oil sector in our country, one of the main areas that come to attention is the production areas that are included in the area previously called "light industry". Back in the Soviet era, the areas included in the light industry in Azerbaijan were significantly developed: in the 80s of the 20th century, approximately 20 percent of industrial production in Azerbaijan was accounted for by the light industry. At that time, one of the developed light industries in Azerbaijan was the production of leather and leather products. The current state of processing of leather products in our country and the production of final finished products from it is reflected in the following figure (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 1. The main indicators of the work of enterprises engaged in the production of leather and shoes**

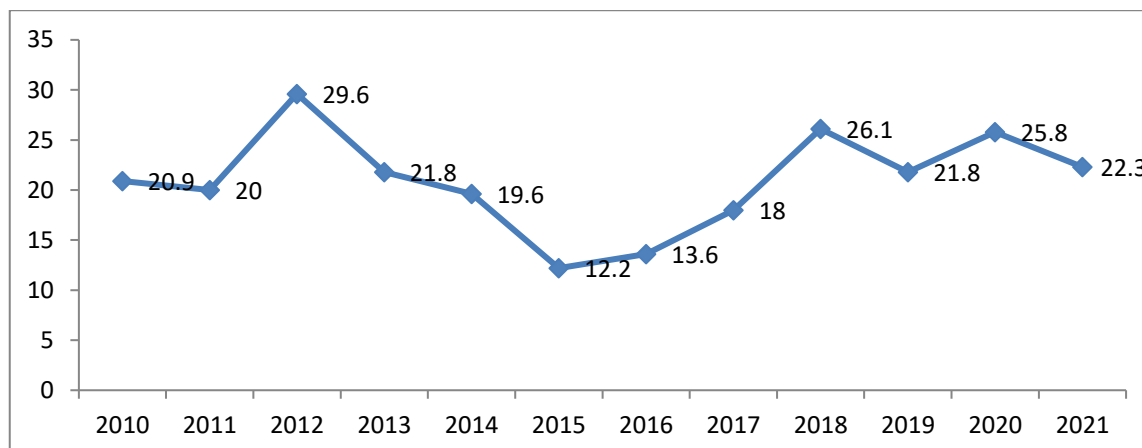


(Source: State Statistical Committee)

Since 2005, the value expression volume of the production of leather goods has started to increase. In 2012, it reached the highest level - 29.6 million manats. In the following periods, a downward trend was observed and in 2015 it fell to the lowest level after 2007 - 12.2 million manats. Starting from 2016, a growth trend was observed again, and in 2018, it increased to 26.1 million manats. In the following periods, it showed an unstable trend. (Figure 2)

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.stat.gov.az/source/industry/az/014\\_6.xls](https://www.stat.gov.az/source/industry/az/014_6.xls)

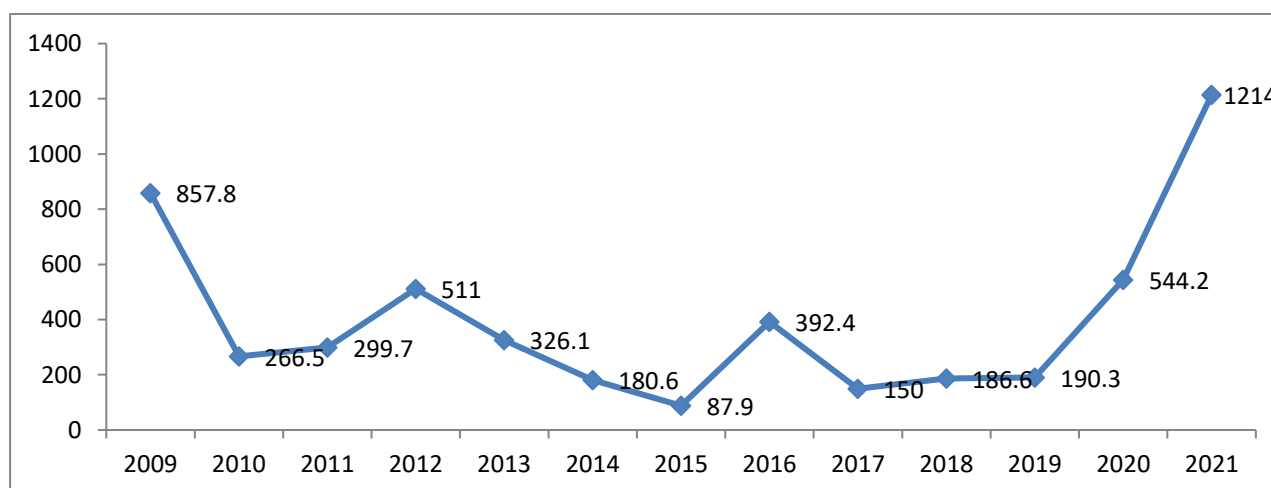
**Figure 2. Production of leather and leather products and shoes, in actual prices (million manats)**



(Source: State Statistical Committee)

Among the types of leather products in Azerbaijan, shoe production is widespread. Currently, more than 1 million pairs of shoes are produced in the country during the year.<sup>2</sup> The lowest production rate in the history of the country was recorded in 1999 - 54 thousand pairs of shoes. In the following years, there was an increase in the production of shoes, and the amount of production reached 857.8 thousand pairs in 2009. Although there was a sharp decrease in production in the following years (87.9 thousand pairs in 2015), production has started to increase again since 2019. In 2021, 1 million 214 thousand pairs of shoes were produced in the country (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Dynamics of shoe production in the country (thousand pairs)**



(Source: State Statistical Committee)

Currently, Azerbaijan occupies one of the last places among the post-Soviet countries in terms of the volume of shoe production.<sup>3</sup> In 2018, 122.9 million pairs of shoes were produced in Russia,

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/industry/az/009.xls>

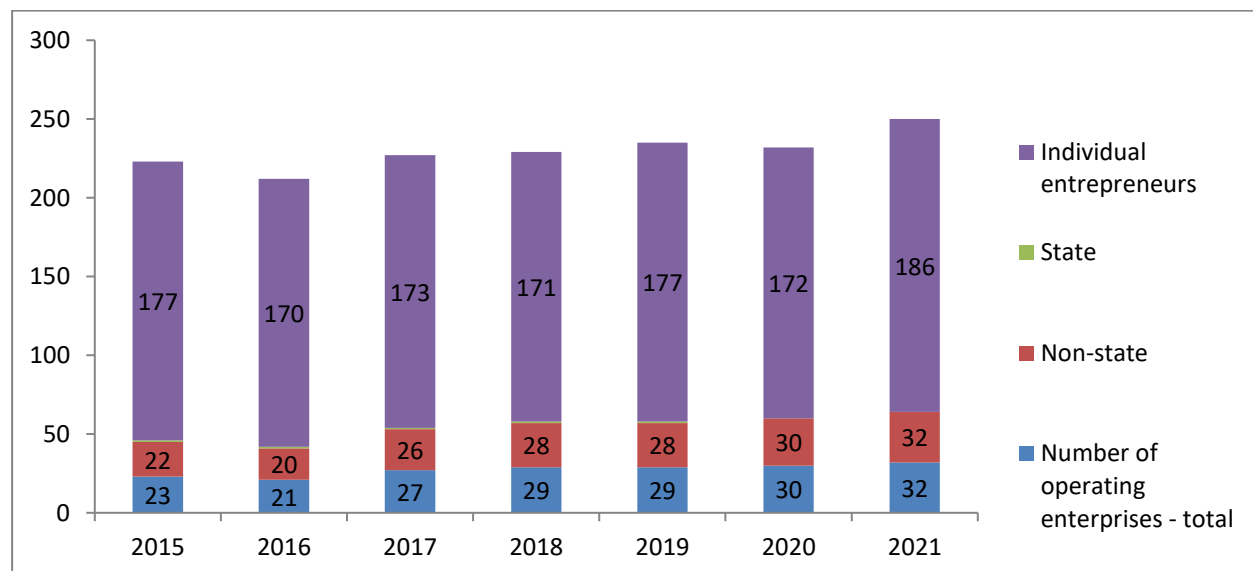
<sup>3</sup> [https://www.stat.gov.az/menu/6/statistical\\_yearbooks/source/industry\\_2022.zip](https://www.stat.gov.az/menu/6/statistical_yearbooks/source/industry_2022.zip)

which is 31.2 million more than in 2015. However, 93.6 million pairs of shoes were produced in Russia in 2020. Currently, Azerbaijan has the lowest production index in the CIS after Armenia. According to statistical data, in 2019, Azerbaijan ranked last in terms of the number of pairs of shoes per person (0.02).

In 2021, the number of enterprises engaged in the production of leather and leather products and footwear in the country increased from 23 to 32 compared to 2015. Among these enterprises, only one - Baku Shoe Factory - is a state enterprise, which was recently privatized. Pepi-Ali Peasant Farming LLC was the winner of the investment competition announced by the State Service on Property Issues under the Ministry of Economy for the sale of 85% of the shares of Baku Shoe Factory OJSC and the rest of the shares from the discounted sale of shares to the members of the labor collective. According to the terms of the purchase agreement signed with that company, the company promised to transfer 3.5 million manats to the state budget for the purchase of the company's shares and to invest 5.5 million manats in the company within the next 2 years and 6 months. Within the framework of the company's Investment Program, it is planned to purchase modern equipment for the enterprise, repair and rebuild buildings, increase the raw material base of the enterprise, improve the infrastructure, create 110 new jobs, and establish cooperation with local producers in the field of purchasing leather, which is the main raw material base of the enterprise.

Along with legal entities, private entrepreneurs also operate in the field of the production of leather and leather products. The number of individual entrepreneurs registered in this field was 177 in 2015, and 186 in 2021. (Figure 4)

**Figure 4. The number of entrepreneurs engaged in the production of leather and leather products and shoes**

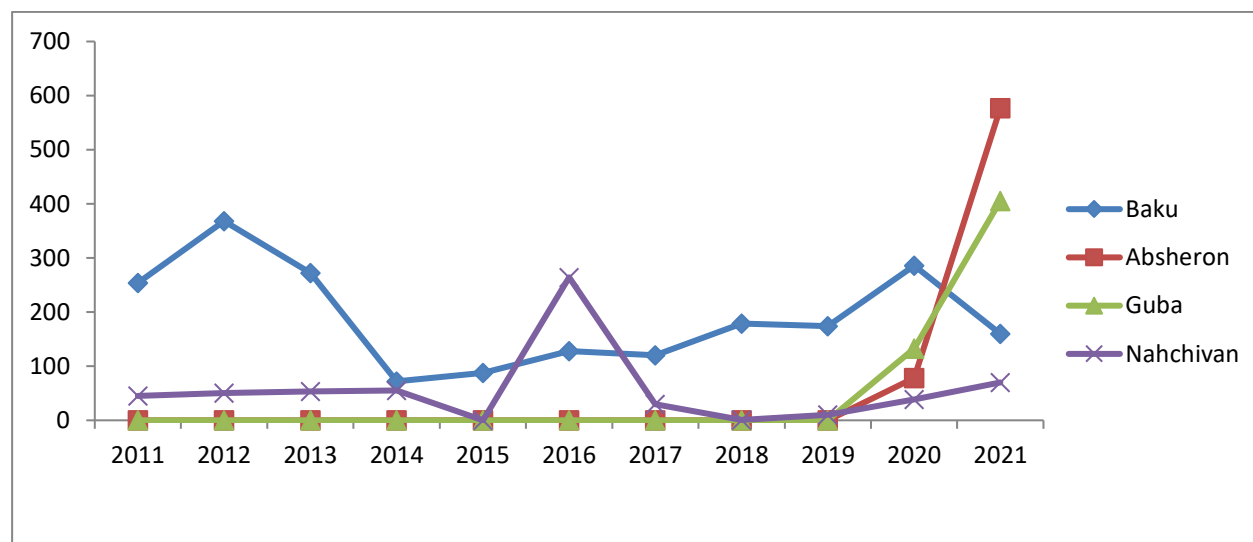


(Source: State Statistical Committee)

The area share of the business of enterprises engaged in the production of leather and leather products and shoes is very small in the total volume of industrial products produced in the

country. So, this indicator remains almost constant at 0.1 percent every year. Shoe production was recorded mainly in Baku, Absheron, Nakhchivan, and Guba. (Figure 5)

**Figure 5. Shoe production by regions, thousand pairs**



(Source: State Statistical Committee)

As can be seen from the figure, shoe production in Absheron and Guba started in 2020. Starting from 2020, enterprises have been established in those areas and indicators increased.

According to the State Statistical Committee, in the period up to 2015, about 800-1,200 square meters of leather were produced in Azerbaijan. From Figure 1, it can be seen that the amount of leather not subjected to processing other than tanning has increased at a somewhat stable rate in 2015-2019. However, sharp differences appeared in 2019-2021. So, in 2020, it decreased sharply from 1,944.3 tons to 716.2 tons, but in 2021, it increased 4.6 times and reached 3,301.4 tons.

It should be noted that the government has taken a number of decisions to limit the export of raw leather. Starting from 2016, by changing the rates of customs duties on export-import transactions, raw leather products have been subject to export duties for a period of 5 years. According to the decision, starting from November 5, 2016, the leathers of cattle and small cattle or equine animals have been subject to export duty, and a duty of USD 500 per ton is charged. In the "Strategic Roadmap for the Production and Processing of Agricultural Products in the Republic of Azerbaijan" adopted in 2016, importance is given to leather production, and these goods are included in the group of potential export products. The document envisages defining support mechanisms for further increasing the production and export of these products. Furthermore, the government takes measures to protect the domestic market. Import of leather products is subject to customs duties and taxes. Since 2016, the amount of tax on imported goods has increased.

According to the amendments made to the Tax Code in 2016, fur and leather products imported into the country are subject to excise tax. According to the presidential decree of 2016, during

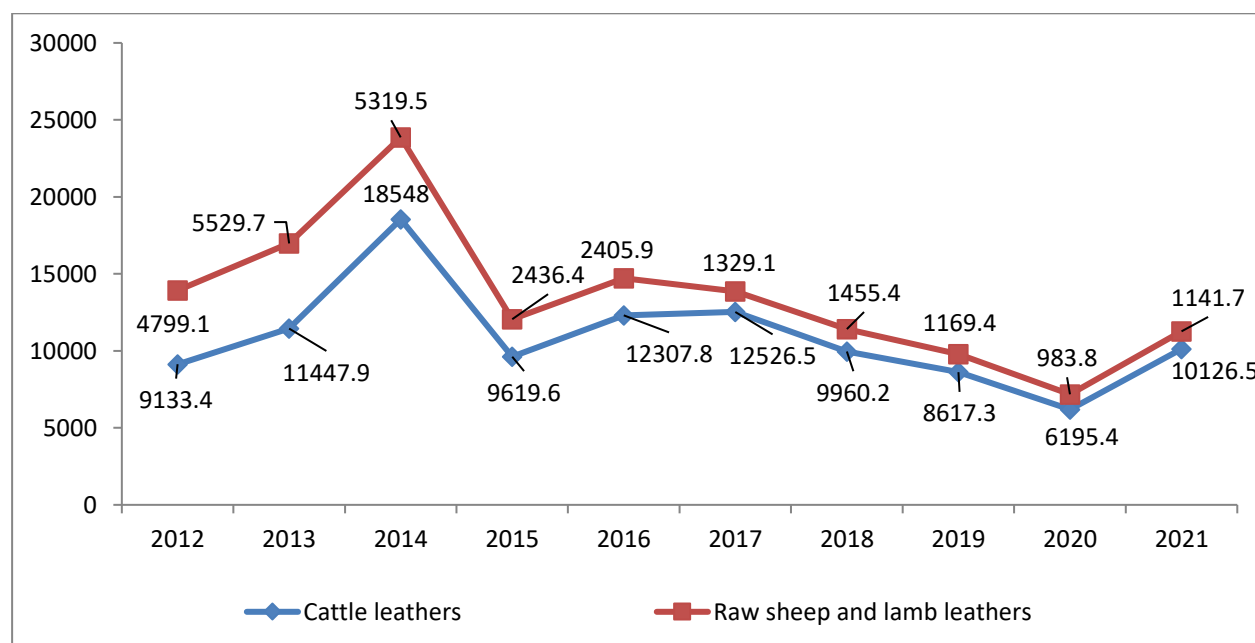


the export of natural leather shoes, natural leather clothing, and other products, funds in the amount of 6 percent of the customs value specified in the customs declaration are paid.

When examining the leather sector, it is very important to look at its export and import figures. In the strategic roadmaps adopted by the government, leather goods are included in the group of manufacturing industry products with the potential to replace imports. Moreover, these documents envisage the development of the processing of leather industry products. It is reported that these documents take into account the preparation of a package of special tools and incentives applicable to the main products. The package envisages the introduction of more effective means and support packages applied by the state based on the identification of more favorable regions for leather products. In particular, in order to fully use the production potential of family farms, various development programs will be prepared in the direction of forming a network of medium and small wool and hide processing enterprises at the district level and at the village level. According to the Roadmap, in 2017-2020, the development of the processing industry of cotton, cocoons, wool, and raw materials has been prioritized.

Despite the dependence of domestic production on imported raw materials, the country's local leather raw materials are exported.<sup>4</sup> If we look at the 10-year export dynamics reflected in Figure 6, we will see that between 2012 and 2016, leather was exported from the country in the amount of 81.6 million dollars. Of these, 61.1 million dollars are cattle leathers, and 20.5 million dollars are small cattle leathers. In the last 5 years, the total volume of raw leather exports was 53.6 million dollars. The country received 47.5 million dollars from cattle leather and 6.1 million dollars from small cattle leather.

**Figure 6. Dynamics of raw leather exports, in thousand dollars**



*(Source: State Statistical Committee)*

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.stat.gov.az/menu/6/statistical\\_yearbooks/source/trade\\_2022.zip](https://www.stat.gov.az/menu/6/statistical_yearbooks/source/trade_2022.zip)

According to the State Statistical Committee, unprocessed hides and tanned hides were imported to the country in the amount of 499 thousand dollars in 2017, 1,329.5 thousand dollars in 2018, 557.6 thousand dollars in 2019, 429.4 thousand dollars in 2020, and 552.2 thousand dollars in 2021.

**Table 1: Share of countries in Azerbaijan's raw leather imports in 2021<sup>5</sup>**

<b>Raw hides and skins (other than fur skins) and leather</b>	
<b>Countries</b>	<b>Trade value (in dollars)</b>
China	2.804.631
Hong Kong	3.859
Portugal	146.172
India	608.464
Turkey	14.709.873
Ukraine	261.782

The volume of raw hides and skins (other than fur skins) and leather imported by Azerbaijan from countries around the world is reflected in UN Comtrade Database, which is an international database. As you can see from the table above, the largest amount of imports was made from Turkey, which is 79.3 percent of the total imports.<sup>6</sup> China takes second place in terms of leather exports to Azerbaijan. Domestic production in the country is carried out at the expense of imported raw materials. Although efforts are being made to increase the local sources of raw materials for the production of leather goods in Azerbaijan, this has not yet been cost-effective. If we can efficiently process hides and skin products from slaughtered cattle and small cattle in the country, it can meet the demand for the raw hide to some extent. However, one of the problematic points is that the presence of skin diseases in animals prevents their skins from being fully involved in the production process. Therefore, in the adopted Strategic Roadmap on the "Production and Processing of Agricultural Products", the issue of phytosanitary examination and treatment-prophylactic measures for livestock throughout the country was especially emphasized. The skins of cattle and small cattle imported into the country can be widely used as raw leather. Because imported animals mean potential hides. Using them effectively and comprehensively will increase the resource base. Of course, the health of those animals and the presence of any skin diseases should be checked so that a more intensive production process can take place.

The import of cattle has been decreasing in recent years. Of course, the first priority in bringing animals to the country is to meet the population's demand for meat and meat products. Raw leather materials play the role of intermediate consumption in this process. In recent years, the increase in beef production in the country compared to previous years has been reflected in a

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<sup>5</sup>

<https://comtradeplus.un.org/TradeFlow?Frequency=A&Flows=M&CommodityCodes=41&Partners=31&Reporters=all&period=2021&AggregateBy=none&BreakdownMode=plus>

<sup>6</sup> <https://comtradeplus.un.org/>

certain decrease in imports. So, in 2016, 130,000 tons of beef were produced in the country, and in 2021, this figure was 145,000 tons.

#### 4. Steps aimed at stimulating the production of leather products in the country

To protect the domestic market, the government imposes customs duties and taxes on both imports and exports of leather goods, and since 2016, the tax burden on imported goods has been further increased.

According to the Resolution<sup>7</sup> of the Cabinet of Ministers dated April 12, 2001, No. 80 on Rates of Customs Duties for Export-Import Operations and the Amount of Fees Received for Customs Clearance in the Republic of Azerbaijan, various types of bags, clothes, shoes, and household goods made of leather are subject to import duty at the rate of 15%. Furthermore, according to the Resolution<sup>8</sup> of the Cabinet of Ministers dated January 31, 2005, No. 11 on the List of Goods Imported into the Territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Exempted From Value-Added Tax, tax concessions and exemptions are not applied to leather products, and when these products are imported, according to Article 173.1 of the Tax Code, 18% of the value of imported goods is subject to VAT. Based on the amendment to the Tax Code dated December 16, 2016, by Law No. 454-VQD, imported fur and leather products have been subject to excise tax. According to Article 190.4 of the Tax Code, excise rates in the amount of 10 percent of the customs value not lower than the wholesale market price are applied to imported fur and leather products.

Some decisions taken in the direction of promoting the development of the non-oil sector create certain opportunities for the expansion of investments by entrepreneurs working in the leather goods sector. So, according to the amendments and additions to the Tax Code on January 19, 2016, when receiving an investment incentive:

- ✓ individual entrepreneurs are exempt from tax at the level of 50% of income tax and legal entities are exempt from tax at the level of 50% of profit tax for 7 years;
- ✓ both legal entities and individual entrepreneurs are exempt from VAT for the import of machinery and technological equipment and devices for a period of 7 years from the date of receipt of the investment promotion document;
- ✓ both legal entities and individual entrepreneurs are exempt from property tax for 7 years from the date of receipt of the investment promotion document;
- ✓ both legal entities and individual entrepreneurs are exempt from land tax for 7 years from the date of receipt of the investment promotion document.

In addition, concessions are applied to the import of production equipment. According to Article 20.0.16 of the Law on Customs Tariff, leather goods are exempted or partially exempted from customs duty in the following cases.

- ❖ Import of machinery and technological equipment and devices by legal entities and individual entrepreneurs, who have received the investment promotion document in the manner determined by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, on the basis of the

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<sup>7</sup> <https://e-qanun.az/framework/28144>

<sup>8</sup> <https://e-qanun.az/framework/7350>

- confirmation document of the Ministry of Economy - for a period of 7 years from the date of receipt of the investment promotion document;
- ❖ Import of machinery and technological equipment and devices by legal entities and individual entrepreneurs, who are residents of industrial or technology parks for the purpose of construction of production areas in industrial or technology parks, created according to the decision of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, carrying out scientific-research and experimental-constructive works, and production, based on the confirmation document of the Ministry of Economy - for a period of 7 years from the date of registration of the resident in industrial or technology parks;
  - ❖ Import of all types of goods for the purposes of that activity by the resident of the industrial park, engaged in the activity specified by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the industrial park, created according to the decision of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, based on the confirmation document of the Ministry of Economy - for a period of 5 years from May 1, 2016.

Approved by the Decree of the President of the country dated April 20, 2016, Rules<sup>9</sup> for Issuance of Approval Document for the Import of Machinery, Technological Equipment and Devices to Legal Entities and Individual Entrepreneurs Having Received an Investment Promotion Document determines the procedures for issuing a confirmation document for the import of devices. According to the Rules, an entrepreneur who has received an investment promotion document is presented with a confirmation document for the import of relevant equipment and devices, and based on this document, they have the opportunity to benefit from the benefits provided by both the Tax Code and the Law on Customs Tariff.

One of the important normative legal documents is the rules for granting export incentives to non-oil products. According to Presidential Decree No. 811 dated March 1, 2016, on Additional Measures Related to the Promotion of the Export of Non-Oil Products, export incentives have been paid at the expense of the state budget to those engaged in the export of non-oil products in the country. The base amount of the export incentive to be paid is 3 (three) percent of the customs value of the actually exported goods, as specified in the export customs declaration, according to the export operations. In the implementation of this Decree, the list of non-oil products to which export promotion will be applied was approved by the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 401 dated October 6, 2016, and shoes and clothing made of natural leather and other products were included in this list. Based on the decision, two coefficients are applied to the base amount of the export incentive for clothing and footwear made of natural leather. This means that during the export of these groups of goods, they will receive funds in the amount of 6 percent of the customs value specified in the customs declaration.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://e-qanun.az/framework/32604>

## 5. Technological stages of leather production

Producing leather is a very laborious and long process. For the implementation of these processes, raw materials must be provided first. But the work does not end only with raw materials. Availability of material and technical base and qualified personnel is a very important need to implement the leather processing process. If we consider the stages of leather processing, we will see the following processes:

**Preservation:** After the animal is skinned, it is highly susceptible to bacterial activity and begins to deteriorate rapidly. To prevent this, the skin is protected in various ways. The most common method is salting the skin. The salting process lowers the water level of the skin and prevents bacterial activity.

**Soaking and softening:** The soaking process restores the leather's naturally swollen structure and removes impurities, soluble proteins and substances used in the preservation process.

**Calcification:** The hair and epidermis layer are removed from the skin, the natural oils in the skin are saponified and the active groups are released which will ensure that the tanning substances bind and form a firm structure.

**Fleshing:** The hypodermis, the fatty layer of the skin subjected to swelling by the calcification process, is mechanically removed from the skin, which is not important in leather production.

**Splitting:** This stage is the process of separating the skin, which is too thick, from the cut to obtain the part of the skin that will be used in the production of genuine leather.

**Descaling:** It is the process of chemically or mechanically removing the lime adhering to the skin through the calcification process.

**Cleansing:** With the use of special enzymes, the type of protein that does not work in the production of skin is dissolved.

**Degreasing:** The process of reducing the fat content to a level that will not cause problems for hides such as high-fat sheepskins.

**Pickling:** This is the process of acidifying the leather so that the chrome tanning materials can penetrate the leather and carry out the tanning process.

**Tanning:** Collagen, which is the main component of skin that has been cleaned as much as possible in previous processes, is transformed into a solid structure that can be used without breaking down and rotting.

**Sorting:** It is the process of classifying tanned hides according to quality characteristics like skin condition etc.

**Wringing:** The process of mechanically removing excess water from the skin.

**Splitting (After Tanning):** The process of separating the desired thickness of leather from the cut to obtain the leather section to be used in the production of genuine leather. Thus, the skin is brought closer to the desired shaving thickness. Furthermore, the split skins obtained are evaluated in various ways. If the skins have been limed, they usually do not split after tanning.

**Shaving:** Skins are mechanically trimmed to the desired finish thickness.

**Neutralization:** This is the process of reducing the acidity of the skin so that the dyes, fillers, and lubricants that will be used in the subsequent processes can have a good effect on the skin.

**Treatment:** It is the treatment of the skin with various synthetic or plant-based substances in order to have the desired fullness and firmness. Thus, the tanning process improves.

**Dyeing:** It is the process of coloring the skin with different types of dyes.

**Greasing:** The process of treating the leather with various lubricants to bring it to the desired softness and shape suitable for use with the handle.

**Open wringing:** It is a process in which the skin is opened mechanically by dehydrating it.

**Drying:** It is the process of drying the skin by lowering its moisture level by various methods.

**Finishing:** It is a broad stage that includes the processes by which the desired properties of the finished leather are obtained. Leather is given its final state by finishing processes.

A leather manufacturer needs mainly machinery and technology to be able to carry out these processes. Moreover, the availability of personnel to carry out the initial processes, and qualified personnel in the final stages, is of particular importance. These in themselves do not affect the production capacity. According to the statistical examination published by the State Statistical Committee, the level of utilization of the production capacity of the production of leather and leather products and shoes in Azerbaijan is 43.6 percent. The utilization rate of the production capacity of sheep and lamb skins is 73 percent.

One of the reasons for the low production capacity is that the production capacity of the equipment is not fully utilized. Among the main problems are the old equipment (50%) and the lack of highly qualified (professional) personnel in the field of production of hides (by number) of cattle and equine animals. The effect of the lack of professional personnel in the field of sheep and lamb skins is 100 percent.<sup>10</sup> This power cannot be used in leather products for shoes due to the lack of raw materials (50%). The lack of qualified personnel is also felt here. 100% of the main reason for the field of leather, which is made from non-intact hides of cattle, is the lack of demand (decrease in the volume of work provided for in the orders, seasonal nature of the orders, etc.). The reason for not fully using the production capacity of the equipment in the production of shoes, which is the final product, is 100 percent stated as lack of demand. There is also a need to classify the equipment installed in this area according to the service life. The distribution of machines for the processing of animal skins, tanned leather, or for making or repairing shoes and other goods according to the period of operation is as follows.

- up to 5 years - 31.3%
- 5-9 years - 30.1%
- 10-19 years - 36.9%
- 20 years and more - 1.7%.

This equipment is mainly produced in Germany, China, Iran, Italy, and Turkey.

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<sup>10</sup> [https://www.stat.gov.az/source/industry/az/industry\\_guc\\_2020.pdf](https://www.stat.gov.az/source/industry/az/industry_guc_2020.pdf)

## 6. Conclusion and recommendations

As a result of the study, it was found that the amount of leather in the country, which is not subjected to any other processing than tanning, has increased sharply in recent years, while a steady decrease was observed in the amount of processed leather. If we look at the production of shoes, it has increased with a high growth rate since 2017 in natural value. Here the question arises, if the leather processed in the country is decreasing, how is the production of shoes increasing? According to the response to the information request addressed to the State Statistical Committee within the framework of the study, the export of leather products that have not undergone post-tanning processing in recent years has led to a decrease in the production of "processed leather" products. Therefore, shoe production was mainly carried out using imported leather. Although shoe production is increasing in natural value, there is a decrease in actual value. So, the period with the highest record in terms of actual value is 2012, and during this period, 29.6 million dollars worth of shoes were produced. In natural value, this indicator was 511 thousand pairs. The highest natural indicator was recorded in 2021, which was 1 million 214 thousand pairs. The value created with the actual value was 22.3 million dollars. In the response by the SSC to the information request, the reason for this is shown as the cost price of the product and the fluctuating market price index.

**Based on our study, the problems that hinder the development of the field of leather and leather products in our country can be grouped as follows:**

- Export of quality leather;
- Lack of investment in the hide and skin industry, lack of foreign investors;
- Making hides useless or less useful during slaughter in many slaughterhouses;
- Prevalence of skin diseases in cattle;
- Improper accounting of import and export, production and consumption;
- Lack of highly qualified personnel;
- The long duration of service life of some of the equipment, lack of modern technology
- Lack of scientific research in this field and its application to the production process

**The implementation of the following measures is recommended to develop the leather goods sector:**

- ❖ Strengthening the quality control of leather products imported into the country;
- ❖ Attracting investment in this area, organizing a policy that will attract the interest of foreign investors in particular;
- ❖ Taking necessary measures to prevent skin diseases;
- ❖ Development of mechanisms for proper accounting of import and export and strengthening of its control;
- ❖ Wide use of modern production equipment in the sector and increasing the state support necessary for this;
- ❖ Increasing the application of scientific research to the production process;
- ❖ Development of a special state program aimed at the development of the light industry, especially the leather sector;



- ❖ Reducing the dependence of local production on the import of raw materials, stimulating the use of local raw materials;
- ❖ Taking necessary measures to increase the quality of leather raw materials;
- ❖ Proper assessment of demand in the local consumer market when producing products;
- ❖ Increasing attention to the training of highly qualified personnel in the field of leather goods production, creating suitable qualifications for this field in vocational educational institutions.

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Reference to IDI is compulsory when using information.

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