

PRESS RELEASE

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‘Refused, driven away from and almost run over’: assistance dog handlers share everyday experiences of exclusion, discrimination and humiliation.

June 2 2025 — An alarming new global survey reveals widespread challenges for handlers and their assistance dogs accessing public spaces, despite many countries having laws to protect their rights. Assistance dog handlers report discrimination, humiliation and exclusion from public transport, restaurants and medical facilities.

The *Paws For Access Report on Assistance Dog Rights*, published jointly by Assistance Dogs International (ADI) and the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF), contains responses from more than 1,200 assistance dog handlers in 24 countries across the world.

Among the most concerning findings are the emotional and behavioral toll on assistance dog handlers, particularly those living with blindness or visual impairment. Four out of every ten assistance dog handlers — and 48% of guide dog handlers — say they sometimes stay at home or avoid public places because of the hostility they encounter when out and about.

“The repercussions of a handler being denied entry with their assistance dog extend way beyond immediate practical inconveniences,” says ADI Executive Director Chris Diefenthaler. “The emotional and subsequent behavioral impact of these experiences can last a long time. On top of living with a physical or mental disability, many handlers feel burdened, frustrated and anxious.”

The report looks in detail at the main challenges experienced by assistance dog handlers including access to public spaces and public transport; demands to verify or justify their dogs; fake assistance dogs; emotional and behavioral impact; and infringement of human rights. The USA, UK, Canada and Australia rank among the most unfriendly countries for handlers with assistance dogs, despite having some of the most robust disability and discrimination laws.

“There is an urgent need for improved public education, clearer definitions of assistance dog roles, and stronger enforcement of existing laws,” says David Maynard, Executive Director of IGDF. “This would help mitigate the challenges faced by handlers and promote a more inclusive and accessible environment for all assistance dog handlers. Despite legal frameworks designed to protect handlers’ rights, implementation and enforcement is inconsistent across different regions and countries, reflecting the global disparity in the treatment and perception of assistance dogs.”

Responses suggest the worst places for access include restaurants and cafes (56%); hotels and other accommodation (28%); medical facilities (28%); and grocery stores (19%). One respondent write “I was refused entry to a restaurant because they said my dog would cause allergies to other customers,” whilst another not, “I often feel anxious and frustrated because of the constant refusals and skepticism.”

Perhaps most worryingly — given that many assistance dog handlers are frequent users of hospitals and clinics — 28% of respondents report discrimination while accessing medical facilities. Many note that poorly trained, uncontrollable and disruptive ‘therapy dogs’ present in some medical facilities tend to interfere with ADI or IGDF certified assistance dogs.

Public transport also comes in for strong criticism, with 56% of respondents globally experiencing refusals in taxis or rideshare vehicles. Guide dog handlers report even higher refusal rates (63%). “Uber and Lyft are the most difficult,” writes one visually impaired respondent. “I’ve been refused, driven away from, almost run over — you name it.” Another notes: “Drivers suddenly accelerate when they see me waiting with my service dog.”

The survey also reveals stark regional and national disparities. In the UK and Netherlands, 79% of handlers report multiple access refusals within the last year, with Russia coming a close second at 71% and Ireland (60%), Australia (58%) and the USA (35%) also scoring poorly.

Assistance dog handlers also highlight the rise in untrained, out-of-control and poorly behaved fake service dogs, leading to skepticism or even hostility towards genuine assistance dog handlers. 50% of respondents report demands to verify their dog as a bona fide assistance dog. One handler was turned away from a hotel “because they didn’t believe my dog was a legitimate service animal.”

Faced with these challenges, ADI and IGDF are calling for greater awareness, education and legislative changes. “This report is further evidence of the significant and consistent challenges faced by assistance dog handlers daily,” said Diefenthaler. “Despite legal provisions aimed at facilitating access, many still face undue challenges and discrimination, which not only hinders their daily activities but also impacts their emotional wellbeing.”

The report recommends a five-point action plan to help change public attitudes and behavior based on better education; stronger and more standardized regulations; improved identification of assistance dogs; training for small business owners; and legal reform. “The report makes it clear these are not isolated incidents but part of a broader systemic problem that requires a multifaceted approach,” adds Maynard. “By implementing these measures, we can create a more inclusive and understanding environment for assistance dog handlers which preserves their dignity and rights.”

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Notes for editors

The full *Paws For Access Report on Assistance Dog Rights* can be downloaded [here](#). For interview requests and more information, please contact [Chris Diefenthaler](#) or [David Maynard](#).

About Assistance Dogs International (ADI)

ADI is the world's leading standards-setter and accreditation body for training assistance dogs. As a worldwide coalition of nearly 200 non-profit member organizations spread across five continents, ADI is the world's most diverse and inclusive assistance dog certification and standard-setting body. For more information visit <https://assistancedogsinternational.org>.

About the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF)

IGDF is the charity that defines and maintains international standards for the training of guide dogs around the world. This work ensures the quality and safety of guide dog services for people who are blind or have low vision. As well as developing international standards, IGDF supports new guide dog organizations around the world, helping them to grow and progress towards full accreditation against the IGDF standards. For more information visit <https://www.igdf.org.uk/>