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SRI LANKA

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS AND HR LEADERS

MYTH BUSTING TOOLKIT

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HIRING BLIND AND LOW-VISION TALENT IN SRI LANKA

PROJECT V.I.E.W.

VISION-IMPAIRED EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE-READINESS

Introduction

For many blind and low-vision people in Sri Lanka, one of the biggest barriers to employment is not lack of skill, but the assumptions and doubts of others.

This Myth-Busting Toolkit is part of Project VIEW (Vision-Impaired Employment and Workplace-readiness), supported by the Australian Government through Australia Awards – Sri Lanka (as part of Australia Awards South Asia and Mongolia). It was developed through a practical co-design process that brought together the lived experience of blind and low-vision people with the real questions and concerns of employers and HR professionals.

The toolkit provides simple, clear, practical responses to common myths about hiring blind and low-vision employees. Its purpose is to help employers transition from uncertainty to confidence, and from good intentions to inclusive action.

This effort is not about charity. It is about recognising skills, removing unnecessary barriers, and creating fair access to employment opportunities. Blind and low-vision people are diverse. They have different skills, experiences, support needs and career goals.

Note on language used in this toolkit

Vision-impaired people include people who are blind and people living with low vision. For this reason, we use the term “blind and low-vision” throughout this document.

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Module 01

The Business Case and Sri Lankan Reality

Employers may have practical concerns about productivity, technology, safety, or customer acceptance. These concerns are understandable. However, when there is limited exposure and limited guidance, these concerns can easily turn into assumptions.

This module sets out the business case for including blind and low-vision people in employment. It shows why doing so can strengthen organisations in Sri Lanka – not as charity, but as a practical way to access talent, improve teams, and build fairer workplaces.

The benefits of recruiting blind and low-vision people

01. A wider talent pool

Sri Lanka has a large untapped pool of capable workers. According to Sri Lanka's 2012 Census, 70.9% of persons with disabilities of employment age were not engaged in economic activity. This is broader than the unemployment rate and includes people outside the labour force. While this figure covers all disabilities and is now more than a decade old, it remains the most commonly cited national figure available and continues to show that a large group of people remain outside the workforce.

Blind and low-vision candidates may bring a wide range of qualifications, digital skills, communication abilities, problem-solving ability and professional experience. Employers who only recruit through traditional channels often miss this talent entirely.

02. Stronger teams and workplace performance

Including blind and low-vision employees can improve how the whole team works. Teams often become better at communicating clearly, sharing information in accessible formats, and respecting different working

styles. These improvements can benefit everyone.

Some blind and low-vision people develop adaptive strategies in planning, listening, memory, flexibility and problem-solving through daily life and education. These strengths can add real value to any workplace. Each candidate should be assessed on their actual skills.

03. Better workplace systems

When organisations make information and processes accessible, they usually become clearer and more efficient for everyone. Documents that work well with screen readers are often easier to read. Structured onboarding and clear instructions can improve team performance overall.

Many barriers are created by systems that were designed without considering different ways of working. Removing these barriers can raise standards for the whole organisation.

04. More inclusive and practical leadership

Managing inclusion well can help leaders become more effective. Leaders who learn to understand different needs, remove barriers, and support people to perform at their best develop skills that are useful for managing any team.

Inclusive leadership encourages managers to focus on what a person actually needs to succeed in a role, rather than making decisions based on assumptions.

05. Better customer understanding

A workforce that includes people with different lived experiences is better placed to understand a wider customer base. Persons with disabilities and their families are part of Sri Lanka's communities, markets, and workplaces. Organisations that understand accessibility from the inside are more likely to notice and remove barriers that affect customers as well as employees.

06. Stronger employer reputation

Genuine inclusion can support employer reputation, employee trust, and relationships with customers and communities. Employees, customers, partners, and the wider community notice when inclusion moves from policy to real practice. In Sri Lanka, this can strengthen trust and reputation.

The Sri Lankan employment reality

Many employers in Sri Lanka have limited direct experience working with blind and low-vision professionals.

As a result, uncertainty is natural. Employers may question whether the person can work independently, how the team will adapt, or how customers will respond.

These are reasonable questions. However, without clear information and practical guidance, uncertainty can turn into exclusion. Employers do not need to become disability experts overnight.

They need enough understanding to make fair decisions based on the actual requirements of the role.

Recognising different levels of disadvantage

within the blind and low-vision community

Blind and low-vision people are not a single group. Different people face different and often compounded barriers. Two groups that consistently experience higher exclusion in Sri Lanka are women who are blind or have low vision, and people living in rural or remote areas.

People living in rural areas usually face:



- Much greater transport barriers and longer travel times
- Limited access to disability services, assistive technology training and career guidance
- Fewer local employment opportunities and weaker employer networks
- Higher costs and logistical challenges when attending interviews or training in Colombo or other cities

These compounded barriers mean that women who are blind or have low vision, and rural candidates, are even less likely to be considered for jobs, even when they have the skills and motivation to work.

Inclusive employers who want to reach the full talent pool need to take deliberate, practical steps to reduce these extra barriers.

The rest of this toolkit provides concrete actions employers can take to make recruitment and workplaces fairer for these groups.

Women with vision impairment often face additional challenges that include:



- Greater difficulty accessing education, vocational training and digital skills development
- Higher safety and harassment concerns when using public transport or travelling for work
- Stronger family and community expectations that can limit their freedom to seek employment or work outside the home
- Lower rates of independent mobility training and assistive technology access compared with men

A fair way to look at ability

Blind and low-vision people are not one single type of candidate.

Some are totally blind, while others have partial sight. Some use screen readers or magnification, while others rely on large print or audio. Some travel independently, while others need initial orientation and support. Some are highly skilled in technology, while others excel in communication, administration, customer service, training, or advocacy.

Like all other candidates, they have individual strengths, weaknesses, and learning needs.

The employer's role is not to make assumptions based on disability. It is to assess the person's ability to perform the essential tasks of the role, with reasonable support where needed.

A fair employer looks at ability first. Before concluding that hiring a blind or low-vision person would be difficult, the honest question is: Is this decision based on the person's actual skills and the real requirements of the job, or on assumptions about what blind and low-vision people can or cannot do?

A fair employer looks at ability first.

Key message
of this module

Blind and low-vision inclusion matters because Sri Lanka cannot afford to ignore capable people.

For individuals, employment brings dignity, independence, and social participation. For employers, it can offer access to talent, stronger teams, better systems, improved leadership, wider customer insight, and a stronger reputation.

Inclusion is not about lowering standards. It is about removing unnecessary barriers so that ability can be seen and used fairly. Different groups within the blind and low-vision community face different levels of disadvantage. Recognising this helps employers make more informed and fair decisions.

The following modules provide practical guidance on addressing common concerns, running inclusive recruitment, making reasonable adjustments, and using simple tools to put these ideas into practice.

Module 02

Core Myths vs. Facts

Clear responses to common employer concerns about productivity, cost, safety, technology, independence and reliability.

Many employers do not intentionally exclude blind and low-vision people. Often, exclusion begins with unanswered questions and assumptions. Common concerns include whether the person will be productive, whether the workplace will need expensive changes, whether safety will become an issue, or whether the person will need constant support.

These are practical concerns. They should not be ignored, nor should they be answered with assumptions. This module addresses seven common myths and provides clear, practical facts for Sri Lankan employers.

Myth 01

Blind and low-vision people cannot be productive in a wide range of jobs

Fact 01

Productivity depends on the person, the role, the tools, the training, and the workplace system, not on whether someone can see.

Blind and low-vision people work successfully in administration, customer service, teaching, training, technology, law, finance, counselling, advocacy, communications, and accessibility roles. Some roles may require adjustments, while others do not.

The key question is not whether a blind person can do this job exactly like a sighted person.

The better question is whether this person can perform the essential tasks of the role using the right methods, tools, and support.

Different ways of working do not automatically mean lower productivity. Output, quality, and reliability should be the measures, not whether the work is done visually.

Myth 02



Blind and low-vision people cannot use computers or digital systems

Fact 02



Many blind and low-vision people use computers, smartphones, and digital tools effectively every day.

Blind users commonly work with screen readers, while low-vision users use magnification, high contrast, larger text, or built-in accessibility features. These tools allow them to read emails, write documents, use spreadsheets, attend online meetings, and manage most workplace tasks.

The real issue is usually not the person's ability, but whether the organisation's digital systems are accessible. Some systems work well with assistive technology, while others do not. Employers should check whether their tools and platforms can be used with a keyboard and screen reader before assuming a candidate cannot perform the role.

Myth 03



Hiring a blind or low-vision employee is too expensive

Fact 03



Many workplace adjustments are low-cost or no-cost.

Common low-cost or no-cost adjustments include sharing properly structured Word documents or accessible tagged PDFs instead of image-only scanned files, sending meeting materials in advance, giving clear verbal instructions, keeping walkways clear, adjusting lighting or seating, and allowing the use of built-in accessibility features on existing devices.

Some employees may need specific software or equipment, but the cost should be assessed case by case rather than assumed upfront. International employer research (for example from the Job Accommodation Network) has found that many accommodations cost nothing or involve only modest one-time costs. The bigger cost for many organisations is missing out on capable and committed employees because of unexamined assumptions.

Myth 04



Blind and low-vision employees create safety risks

Fact 04



Safety depends on good planning, clear communication, and basic housekeeping, not on vision alone.

A safe workplace for blind and low-vision people is usually a safer workplace for everyone. Clear walkways, closed cabinet doors, consistent furniture arrangements, and good emergency procedures benefit all staff.

A blind or low-vision employee may need a proper

orientation to the office layout when they join. This is normal for any new employee. The important thing is to avoid making sudden, unannounced changes to the physical environment and to treat safety as an environmental issue rather than a personal one.

Myth 05



A blind or low-vision employee will need constant help

Fact 05



Pity-based treatment can undermine professional dignity and independence. What most blind and low-vision people need is respectful support, especially during the first few weeks, rather than unnecessary supervision.

There is a clear difference between support and over-support. Support means providing the right information, tools, and orientation so the person can work independently. Over-support means assuming the person cannot manage without constant observation and hand-holding.

Many blind and low-vision professionals have already developed strong personal systems for organisation, travel, note-taking, and technology use. Many can work independently once the relevant access barriers are removed, although support needs differ among individuals.

Myth 06



Blind and low-vision employees will take more sick leave or be less reliable

Fact 06



Disability should not be confused with poor reliability. Blindness or low vision should not be treated as evidence of unreliability.

Blindness or low vision does not, in itself, lead to higher absenteeism. Like all employees, blind and low-vision people have individual health, family, and transport situations that should be managed on a case-by-case basis. Reliability should be assessed based on actual performance and attendance records, not on assumptions about disability.

In Sri Lanka, transport can be a practical challenge, especially in heavy traffic or during the rainy season. This is an environmental barrier, not a personal weakness. Reasonable flexibility around arrival times or hybrid work arrangements, where the role allows it, can help maintain reliability without creating unfair advantage.

Myth 07



Blind and low-vision people can only do simple or limited jobs

Fact 07

Blind and low-vision people have different skills, qualifications, and career goals, just like any other group.

Some may be suitable for entry-level roles, while others are well qualified for professional, technical, managerial, or specialist positions. The common mistake is to place all blind and low-vision people into one narrow category. With accessible systems, fair recruitment processes, and reasonable support, the range of roles blind and low-vision people can perform is much wider than many employers assume. Employers should focus on the essential duties of the job and remove requirements that are not genuinely needed to perform the role.

Key message of this module

The seven myths discussed in this module often stem from a lack of exposure rather than ill intent. However, if left unchallenged, they become real barriers to employment. For employers and HR professionals, the practical approach is simple:

- Assess productivity by output and quality, not by whether work is done visually.
- Check whether workplace systems are accessible instead of assuming that the person cannot use technology.
- Assess actual costs and adjustments case by case instead of making assumptions.
- Manage safety through planning and orientation, not fear.
- Provide proper onboarding and respectful support instead of unnecessary supervision.
- Evaluate reliability based on actual performance, not assumptions.
- Assess candidates based on skills and the real requirements of the role.

Module 03

The 3-Step Inclusive Talent Pipeline

Simple, practical steps for accessible job advertisements, fair interviews and respectful candidate support.

Inclusive recruitment does not begin after a blind or low-vision person is hired. It begins from the moment a job opportunity is written and shared. Many capable blind and low-vision people are excluded before they even reach an interview. A job advertisement may be shared only as an image. An online form may not work with a screen reader. An interview may focus more on disability than on skill.

When this happens, the employer may not even realise that a capable candidate has been blocked by the process itself. This module outlines three practical steps for inclusive recruitment: accessible job advertisements, fair interviews, and respectful candidate support. The aim is not to lower standards but to apply the right standards fairly.

Step 01

Make the job advertisement accessible and fair

A job advertisement is often the first signal a candidate receives from an employer. For blind and low-vision candidates, the first barrier is frequently the format of the advertisement.

If a vacancy is shared only as a poster image, a scanned PDF, or a social media graphic without proper text, a screen reader cannot read it. This means a blind candidate may not know the job title, requirements, deadline, or how to apply.

A good job advertisement should be available in readable text. It should clearly state the role, key duties, required skills, location, working arrangement, application method, and closing date.

A fair job advertisement should separate essential requirements from preferred requirements. Ask whether each requirement is truly needed for the role, whether it is copied from an old job description, or whether the task can be done in another way.

Instead of writing

"Must be able to read printed reports and prepare summaries,"

a better version is

"Must be able to review information and prepare accurate summaries in an accessible format."

Instead of writing

"Must have a driving licence",

a better version, if travel is sometimes needed, is

"Must be able to attend meetings or work-related visits when required."

Include a clear disability inclusion statement. Employers should make it clear that persons with disabilities can apply and request reasonable adjustments during recruitment. A short statement is enough. For example:

"Persons with disabilities are encouraged to apply. Candidates who need reasonable adjustments for the application, test, or interview process may contact the HR team at [email address or phone number]."

Use more than one sourcing channel. If an employer only shares vacancies through usual channels, blind and low-vision candidates may not see them. Many persons with disabilities are not fully connected to mainstream recruitment platforms. Employers can widen their reach by also sharing vacancies through disability organisations, community networks, vocational training centres, and university career guidance units.

Reaching women and rural candidates – **practical actions**



Because women with vision impairment and rural job-seekers face extra barriers, employers need to go slightly further than standard inclusive practices:

- Share vacancies through women's disability networks, rural vocational training centres, and provincial disability organisations – not only Colombo-based channels.
- Explicitly state in the job advertisement that flexible start times, hybrid work (where the role allows), and support with interview travel can be discussed.
- Offer interviews via phone, Zoom or Microsoft Teams as a first option, especially for rural candidates, to reduce the need for expensive and difficult travel.
- When a woman with vision impairment is shortlisted, ask (respectfully and privately) whether any safety-related travel support or female accompaniment would make attendance easier.
- Avoid scheduling early-morning interviews that require women to travel in the dark or in unsafe conditions.

These small adjustments significantly increase the chance that qualified women and rural candidates actually reach the interview stage.

Step 02

Make the interview process fair

A fair interview focuses on the candidate's skills, experience, attitude, and ability to perform the role. For blind and low-vision candidates, the interview process should not become a test of how well they can survive an inaccessible system.

When inviting candidates for an interview, ask all candidates whether they need any adjustment for the interview or assessment. This should be part of the normal process. For example:

"Please let us know if any adjustment is needed for the interview or assessment process, such as an accessible document format, additional time, directions to the interview location, or support with the online platform."

Keep interview questions focused on the job. Interviewers should not focus mainly on the person's blindness or low vision. It is acceptable to ask how the candidate would perform the essential tasks of the role. It is not appropriate to ask questions based on curiosity, pity, or personal assumptions.

For example, instead of asking

"How do you live alone if you cannot see?"

a better job-related question is

"This role requires preparing weekly reports using our internal system. What tools or methods do you usually use to work with digital documents?"

Make assessments accessible. If the recruitment process includes written tests, presentations, or online assessments, check whether they are accessible. Can the test be completed using a keyboard? Can a screen reader read the questions? Is the time limit reasonable for the individual and the design of the assessment? Can the candidate use their own assistive technology?

If a platform is inaccessible, explore alternative ways to assess the same skill, such as a verbal exercise, a short written response in an accessible format, or a practical task.

Use respectful communication and guiding. Speak directly to the candidate, not to a companion or guide. Introduce people in the room by name. If the candidate is attending in person, give clear directions in advance. If guiding is needed, ask first before offering assistance. Do not grab, pull, or push.

Step 03

Support the candidate from selection to onboarding

Inclusive recruitment does not end when the candidate is selected. The period between selection and the first day is important. If the employer waits until the first day to think about access, the employee may start work with unnecessary stress.

After offering the role, HR should have a practical, work-related conversation with the candidate. This can include preferred document format, assistive technology used, support needed for the first day, access to the building and workspace, and communication preferences.

A useful question is:

"What information, tools, or adjustments will help you start the role well?"

Prepare the team without making the person uncomfortable. The employer should protect the person's privacy. Disability-related information should not be shared widely without the employee's consent. At the same time, the immediate team may need some practical guidance on inclusive communication habits. Useful habits include sharing documents in accessible formats, saying your name before speaking in group meetings (so the person knows who is talking), and asking before offering help.

The message to the team should not be

"Be careful, a blind person is joining."

A better message is

"We are strengthening how we communicate and share information so everyone can work well."

What employers should avoid

Employers should avoid common mistakes that make recruitment unfair or uncomfortable:

- Assuming the candidate cannot do the job before discussing the actual tasks.
- Asking personal questions that are not related to the role.
- Making the interview only about disability.
- Using inaccessible tests and then rating the candidate poorly.
- Speaking to a companion instead of the candidate.
- Offering help by grabbing or directing the person without asking.
- Lowering expectations out of pity.
- Making promises about inclusion in the advertisement if the process itself is not accessible.

Key message
of this module

The 3-step inclusive talent pipeline helps employers move from good intentions to fair practice.

Accessible job advertisements, fair interview processes, and respectful candidate support are not special favours. They are part of a better recruitment system that allows ability to be seen more clearly. When employers remove unnecessary barriers in the recruitment process, they increase their chances of finding the right person for the role, regardless of disability.

Module 04

Digital, Physical and Reasonable Accommodation Toolkit

Low-cost, actionable guidance on assistive technology, accessible documents, workplace adjustments and reasonable accommodation.

Reasonable accommodation is one of the areas where many employers feel uncertain. Some assume it requires major building changes or expensive technology. In reality, many useful adjustments for blind and low-vision employees are practical, low-cost, and easy to implement when the employer is willing to plan properly.

Accommodation is not about lowering standards. It is about removing unnecessary barriers so the person can perform the role. The standard of work should remain professional. The way the person accesses information or completes a task may be different.

01. Digital access

Most jobs today involve significant digital work, including email, documents, spreadsheets, online meetings, internal systems, and collaboration platforms. Blind and low-vision people can use digital tools effectively when systems are accessible.

A blind employee may use a screen reader. A low-vision employee may use magnification, larger text, high contrast, or other built-in accessibility settings. Common tools include NVDA (free screen reader for Windows), JAWS, VoiceOver on Apple devices, and TalkBack on Android.

Important Note:

Generative AI tools, such as Microsoft Copilot and similar assistants, are increasingly used by some blind and low-vision professionals as optional productivity tools to summarise documents, draft content, explain complex information, and describe images or graphs. These tools can improve productivity when used alongside traditional assistive technology. However, AI output can contain errors or confabulations, image and chart descriptions may be incomplete or incorrect, and confidential or personal information should not be entered into

unauthorised AI tools. AI output requires human verification, and employees must follow organisational privacy, security and information-governance rules. AI should not be treated as a substitute for making core workplace systems accessible.

The important point for employers is that assistive technology, including newer AI tools, helps the employee access the same information others access visually. The challenge is usually not the employee's ability, but whether the workplace systems work well with these tools. Before assuming a task is not possible, employers should check whether the system can be used with a keyboard, whether a screen reader can identify buttons and fields, whether documents are available as readable text, and whether the system has been tested with actual users. Digital access should be treated as part of normal workplace readiness.

02. Accessible documents and information sharing

Documents are a major part of workplace communication. If documents are not accessible, a blind or low-vision employee may be barred from doing the job even when they have the skill.

Accessible documents are usually better documents for everyone. A practical workplace should aim to provide properly structured Word documents or accessible tagged PDFs, and avoid image-only scanned files. Use proper headings, provide alt text (short written descriptions of images and charts so that screen readers can read them aloud), and use readable fonts with good colour contrast.

Meeting materials should be shared in advance when possible. During presentations, speakers should avoid saying only "as you can see here" without explaining the content. A better approach is to describe the key information clearly so everyone in the meeting can follow.

03. Physical workplace adjustments

A physically accessible workplace does not always require major renovation. Many changes are about organisation, consistency, and clear information.

For blind and low-vision employees, the physical environment should be predictable and safe. Employers should keep main walkways clear, keep cabinet doors closed when not in use, maintain consistent furniture arrangements, and secure cables that cross walking paths.

A blind or low-vision employee may need a workplace orientation when they join. This means walking through the office and learning the routes to the desk, washroom, pantry, meeting rooms, and emergency exits. This should not be treated as a burden. Every new employee needs orientation. For a blind or low-vision employee, the orientation should include more verbal description and enough time to understand the layout. Employers should avoid changing the layout without informing the employee in advance.

01. Stairs, steps and level changes

Stairs and sudden level changes can be difficult if they are not clearly marked or explained. For blind employees, good orientation and clear communication are the main supports. For low-vision employees, contrast markings are very useful.

A practical adjustment is to add a clear contrast line or strip at the edge of the first and last step. This helps the person identify where the staircase begins and ends. In busy office buildings, it is also useful to mark uneven steps, glass doors near stairs, and staircase landings where direction changes. This adjustment is not only useful for low-vision employees. It can also help visitors, older employees, and anyone moving quickly through the building.

02. Lighting, glare and low-vision access

Low vision is different from total blindness. Some low-vision employees may read large print, while others need strong lighting, reduced glare, or high contrast. This is why employers should not guess. The best approach is to ask the employee what visual conditions work best for them.

Useful adjustments may include moving the desk away from window glare, providing adjustable task lighting, allowing screen brightness and contrast settings on displays to be changed, and providing documents in digital formats so the employee can enlarge them.

03. Labels, tags and shared office equipment

Shared office equipment can create access barriers when buttons, touchscreens or labels are difficult to see or cannot be read by touch. This includes printers, photocopiers, coffee machines, water dispensers, microwaves and attendance machines. NaviLens offers a useful digital solution for these devices by allowing high-contrast codes to be placed on the equipment so that blind and low-vision employees can detect them from a distance with a free smartphone app and receive clear spoken information about the machine or its controls. For blind employees, tactile labels or raised markers remain valuable for identifying important buttons. For low-vision employees, large-print labels and high-contrast tags are often helpful. The most practical approach is to identify only the equipment the employee will actually use and apply labels or NaviLens codes solely to those items.

04. Reasonable accommodation in daily work

Reasonable accommodation should be discussed with the employee, not decided by guessing. A manager or HR officer can have a respectful, work-related conversation and ask what tools the employee usually uses, what document format works best, whether any systems may need to be tested, and what support would help during the first few weeks.

Reasonable accommodation may include accessible digital documents, screen reader or magnification support, adjusted lighting or seating, clear orientation to the workplace, flexible start or finish times where appropriate, hybrid work where the role allows it, and permission to use personal assistive technology. The accommodation should match the actual job and the actual person. Not every blind or low-vision employee needs the same support.

Low-cost and higher-cost adjustments

Low-cost or no-cost

- Sharing properly structured Word documents or accessible tagged PDFs instead of image-only scanned files

• Sending meeting materials in advance and giving clear verbal instructions
• Keeping walkways clear, cabinet doors closed and furniture arrangements consistent
• Adjusting lighting or seating, and moving a desk away from window glare
• Allowing built-in accessibility features on existing devices (magnification, contrast, larger text)
• A workplace orientation when the employee joins
• Flexible start or finish times, or hybrid work, where the role allows

May involve a modest one-time cost

• Specific software or equipment, where an employee needs it – assessed case by case
• Adjustable task lighting
• A contrast line or strip at the edge of the first and last step
• Tactile labels, large-print tags or NaviLens codes on shared equipment
• A headset so screen reader speech can be private

International employer research (for example from the Job Accommodation Network) has found that many accommodations cost nothing or involve only modest one-time costs. Assess the actual cost case by case and discuss it with the employee.

05. Transport and work-related travel

In Sri Lanka, transport can be one of the biggest practical barriers for blind and low-vision employees. Crowded buses, difficult pavements, unsafe crossings, and heavy traffic can make travel stressful and time-consuming. This does not mean the employee is unreliable. It means the environment is not always accessible.

Employers can support productivity through practical arrangements where possible. This may include flexible arrival and departure times, hybrid work during heavy rain or transport disruption (where the role allows it), clear instructions for off-site meeting locations, and reimbursing reasonable transport for official travel. The aim is not to create unfair advantage, but to remove preventable barriers so the employee can do the work.



For women with vision impairment, safety of travel routes and working hours should be discussed privately and respectfully during the access conversation. Practical adjustments such as flexible start or finish times, hybrid work options where possible, or support with transport arrangements can make a significant difference.

06. Meetings and team communication

Meetings can be made more accessible through better communication habits. In group meetings, especially online meetings, it is useful for speakers to say their name before speaking if voices are not familiar. When referring to slides, charts, or visual information, the speaker should describe the key point clearly.

Meeting organisers should also share the agenda, documents, and links in advance where possible. These practices help blind and low-vision employees participate with confidence. They also make meetings clearer and better organised for everyone.

Practical Tip:



When supporting a blind or low-vision colleague during an online meeting or when helping with a technical issue, give them audio space. Avoid speaking or giving instructions while their screen reader is active, as overlapping voices make it difficult to hear either source clearly. If guidance is needed, ask first whether they would prefer to pause the screen reader or receive support after they have had time to check the system themselves.

07. Working with IT and managers

Digital accommodation often needs cooperation between the employee, manager, and IT team. The employee may know their assistive technology very well. The IT team may know the company systems. The manager may know the work requirements. All three perspectives are needed.

A practical approach is to test the main tools needed for the job before or during the first week. This may include email, Microsoft Office or Google Workspace, online meeting platforms, HR systems, and internal databases. If one system is not fully accessible, the first response should not be to say the job is impossible. The team should explore whether there is a workaround, an alternative process, or an accessibility setting that can help.

08. Keeping standards fair

Reasonable accommodation should support performance, not replace performance. After the required adjustments are in place, the blind or low-vision employee should be managed with the same professional expectations as others. This includes clear job duties, agreed deadlines, quality standards, attendance expectations, feedback, and performance reviews.

Lowering expectations out of pity can be harmful. It may reduce trust, limit career growth, and create unfairness within the team. The right approach is to remove barriers and then assess the employee fairly.

Key message of this module



Digital, physical, and reasonable accommodations are not separate from good management. They are an essential part of creating a workplace where people can perform properly.

For employers, the key actions are to allow screen readers, magnification tools, and emerging AI assistants to be used properly, share information in accessible formats, keep walkways clear and furniture arrangements consistent, mark stairs and level changes where needed, ask the employee what works instead of guessing, recognise local transport barriers and agree on practical arrangements, give screen reader users audio space during meetings and support, describe visual information in meetings, and keep professional expectations clear once barriers are removed. Accommodation works best when it is practical, respectful, and connected to the real duties of the job.

Module 05

Legal Framework and Local Ecosystem

Key legal responsibilities under Sri Lankan and international frameworks, plus useful local organisations and support services.

Inclusive employment is not only good practice. It is also connected to rights, responsibilities, and national development. For Sri Lankan employers, the legal and support system around disability employment may feel unclear. Some employers want to recruit persons with disabilities but may not know what the law says, who to contact, or where to get practical support.

This module gives a clear starting point. It is not legal advice. For complex legal matters, employers should seek professional legal advice. For day-to-day HR and recruitment practice, the message is simple: Persons with disabilities should not be rejected because of disability before giving due consideration to their ability, skills, and reasonable support needs.

The legal foundation

Sri Lanka has national and international commitments that support the rights of persons with disabilities. The Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, No. 28 of 1996 is a key national law. Section 23 specifically prohibits disability-based discrimination in recruitment and restrictions on access to places open to the public.

Sri Lanka signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) on 30 March 2007 and ratified it on 8 February 2016. The CRPD primarily creates obligations for Sri Lanka as a State Party. It provides the international rights framework that Sri Lankan law, policy and employment practice should implement. Article 27 of the CRPD addresses the right of persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others, including the right to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive, and accessible.

For employers, this means disability inclusion should not be treated only as goodwill. It is connected to equality,

non-discrimination, and fair access to work. Some actions are expressly stated in Sri Lankan law, others arise from Sri Lanka's CRPD commitments, and others are recommended inclusive-employment practices.

In practice, employers should ensure that:

- Job advertisements do not unnecessarily exclude persons with disabilities.
- Application methods are accessible or have an alternative contact option.
- Candidates are assessed on real job requirements.
- Interview questions focus on skills and role fit.
- Reasonable accommodations are considered where needed.
- Employees with disabilities have equitable access to training, communication, and workplace systems.
- Performance standards are fair and clear.

Reasonable accommodation in the Sri Lankan context

The CRPD defines reasonable accommodation as necessary and appropriate individual modifications that do not impose a disproportionate or undue burden on the employer. Denial of reasonable accommodation is treated as discrimination. For employers, this means the adjustment should be practical and fair. It should help the person perform the job properly, without creating an excessive cost, major disruption, or unreasonable difficulty for the organisation. Most accommodations for blind and low-vision employees are low-cost or no-cost. Reasonable accommodations may include setting up a screen reader or magnification software, giving documents in accessible formats, sharing training materials in advance, adjusting lighting or seating, providing workplace orientation, making online forms keyboard accessible, giving clear directions, allowing flexible travel arrangements where the role permits, and labelling shared equipment with large print, high contrast, or tactile markers. The key point is that reasonable accommodation should be discussed with the person and connected to the actual job. Employers should not guess. They should ask respectfully what adjustment or support will help the person perform the role properly. Accommodation should not lower the standard of work. It should remove unnecessary barriers so the standard can be met fairly.

Government employment support

Sri Lanka has official employment support services for persons with disabilities and employers.

The Department of Social Services has an Employment Support Unit. Job seekers with disabilities and company managers interested in employing them can visit the Social Service Officer or Human Resource Development Officer at the nearest Divisional Secretariat Office. The officers can support matching job seekers with suitable vacancies and advise companies on communication and work environment after placement.

Important Note:

The National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities describes a government wage subsidy for private employers who recruit persons with disabilities (50% of salary, up to Rs. 15,000 per month, for up to 24 months). Employers should always confirm whether the scheme is currently funded and accepting applications before relying on it. These support services can reduce employer hesitation, but they should not become the main reason for recruitment. The person should still be recruited into a meaningful role with fair expectations, proper support, and a real opportunity to grow.

Local organisations and employer networks

Employers do not need to work alone. Sri Lanka has disability organisations, community networks, lived-experience groups, and employer networks that can support inclusive employment.

Useful organisations and networks include:

- Sri Lanka Council for the Blind
- Sri Lanka Federation of the Visually Handicapped
- Lions Club of Colombo Visionaries
- Department of Social Services Employment Support Unit
- National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities
- The Employers' Federation of Ceylon
- Vocational training centres and disability employment services
- University career guidance units

When engaging with these organisations or individual consultants, employers should share clear information about the job title, location, salary range, required skills, main duties, and accessibility arrangements available. This helps partners understand whether the opportunity is suitable and how best to support it.

Moving from policy to practice

Legal duties are important, but compliance alone is not enough. A company may have an equal opportunity statement and still have an inaccessible application form. A company may say persons with disabilities can apply, but interviewers may not know how to ask respectful questions. A company may hire one person with a disability but fail to provide accessible documents and proper support.

For inclusion to be real, policy must become practice. This means HR policies should mention disability inclusion clearly, job advertisements should invite persons with disabilities to apply, recruitment systems should be accessible, interviewers should be prepared,

reasonable accommodation should be discussed respectfully, managers should know who to contact for support, and employees with disabilities should be given fair opportunities to grow. The law gives the minimum expectation. Leadership decides whether inclusion becomes part of daily work.

Key message of this module



The legal framework and local ecosystem give employers a stronger foundation for inclusive hiring.
For HR leaders and managers, the key actions are to understand the legal foundation, including Sri Lanka's commitments under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, apply fair recruitment practice by assessing candidates according to skills and reasonable support needs, use reasonable accommodation properly, contact government support services when recruiting, connect with local organisations and employer networks by sharing real job opportunities, protect dignity and privacy, and move from policy to genuine practice. Inclusive employment becomes stronger when law, leadership, and local support work together. For Sri Lankan employers, the opportunity is not only to comply with the law, but to build workplaces where blind and low-vision people can contribute with dignity, skill, and confidence.

Module 06

Fast-Track Checklists

Ready-to-use tools for recruitment and selection, digital and IT access, workplace and facilities, and onboarding and management.

Inclusive employment becomes easier when employers have practical tools they can use immediately. This module consolidates the key actions into four practical checklists that HR teams, managers, and IT staff can apply during real workplace decisions.

These checklists are not meant to replace good judgement. They are meant to help employers avoid common mistakes, ask better questions, and prepare the workplace before problems appear. The goal is to make inclusion practical from the beginning.

01. Recruitment and Selection Checklist



Use this checklist for job advertisements, shortlisting, interviews and assessments.

- ☐ Essential duties are clear and focus on what the person must achieve, not only how a sighted person usually performs the task.
- ☐ Unnecessary requirements (for example a driving licence) are included only if they are genuinely essential for the role.
- ☐ The advertisement is shared in readable text format, not only as an image, poster or scanned PDF.
- ☐ The language is respectful and avoids pity-based, charity-based or negative language about disability.

☐ Persons with disabilities are clearly encouraged to apply, and a reasonable adjustment contact is provided.

☐ The application method is accessible (keyboard and screen reader) or an alternative email option is offered.

☐ The vacancy is shared through mainstream platforms and, where suitable, disability organisations and community networks.

☐ Vacancies are also shared through women's disability organisations, rural vocational centres, and provincial networks (not only Colombo-based channels).

☐ The job advertisement explicitly mentions that flexible working arrangements, hybrid options (where suitable), and interview travel support can be discussed.

☐ Remote or hybrid interview options (phone or video) are offered as a standard choice, especially for rural candidates.

☐ When inviting a woman with vision impairment to an in-person interview, the invitation asks (privately) whether any travel or safety support would be helpful.

☐ Interview times avoid very early starts that require unsafe travel for women candidates.

☐ Candidates are shortlisted on skills, experience and role requirements, not on assumptions about disability.

☐ Interview invitations ask all candidates whether any adjustment is needed for the interview or assessment.

☐ Interview questions focus on skills and role fit, not personal curiosity about disability.

☐ Assessments are available in accessible formats, allow keyboard and screen reader use, and measure the real skill required.

☐ Communication is directed to the candidate (not a companion), and guiding support is offered only after asking.

☐ The same professional standard is applied fairly – the candidate is neither rejected unfairly nor selected out of pity.

02. Digital and IT Access Checklist



Use this checklist for IT systems, documents and digital tools.

☐ Key systems can be used with keyboard commands (Tab, Shift+Tab, Enter, arrow keys).

☐ Main buttons, menus, fields and links can be identified by a screen reader.

☐ Magnification, contrast and display settings can be adjusted by the employee.

☐ Documents are provided as properly structured Word files or accessible tagged PDFs (not image-only scanned files).

☐ Meeting materials, agendas and links are shared in advance in accessible formats.

☐ A headset is available if needed so screen reader speech can be private.

☐ Security settings do not block legitimate assistive technology.

☐ An IT contact person is identified for accessibility issues.

☐ Main tools (email, Office or Google Workspace, meeting platforms, HR systems) are tested with assistive technology where possible.

☐ If a system is partly inaccessible, practical workarounds are explored rather than assuming the job cannot be done.

03. Workplace and Facilities Checklist



Use this checklist for the physical environment and shared equipment.

☐ Main pathways, corridors and shared spaces are kept clear of boxes, bags, cables and unnecessary furniture.

☐ Furniture layout is kept consistent and changes are communicated in advance.

☐ Cabinet doors and drawers are kept closed.

☐ A workplace orientation is provided covering desk, washroom, pantry, meeting rooms, lift, staircase and emergency exits.

☐ The first and last steps of staircases, uneven steps and glass doors have clear contrast markings where needed.

☐ Desk position, lighting and glare are reviewed according to the employee's needs.

☐ Shared equipment (printers, coffee machines, water dispensers, attendance machines) is labelled with large-print, high-contrast or tactile markers if required.

☐ Emergency procedures, routes and assembly points are clearly explained.

04. Onboarding and Management Checklist



Use this checklist from selection through the first month.

☐ A work-related access conversation is held before the first day (tools, document formats, adjustments).

☐ For women with vision impairment: safety of travel routes and working hours is discussed privately during the access conversation, and practical adjustments (for example slightly adjusted start times) are considered where possible.

☐ For rural hires: hybrid work options or temporary accommodation support during the first weeks are explored if the role allows.

☐ Transport-related barriers are treated as environmental issues, not personal reliability problems, especially for women and rural employees.

☐ Workstation, software access and login details are ready before the first day.

☐ Onboarding documents and first-day materials are provided in an accessible format.

☐ The employee is welcomed as a professional team member, not as a charity case or inspirational story.

☐ People introduce themselves clearly and the workplace orientation is completed.

☐ Role, reporting lines, working hours, communication channels and immediate priorities are explained clearly.

☐ Support expectations for the first week are agreed, and privacy is protected.

☐ The immediate team receives practical guidance on inclusive communication (accessible documents, saying your name before speaking in meetings, asking before helping).

☐ A first-week check-in is held to review what is working, what barriers remain, and what next actions

are needed.

☐ Performance is reviewed fairly against the same role expectations after reasonable adjustments are in place.

☐ Growth opportunities, training access and team habits are reviewed after the first month.

☐ The employee's feedback is respected and lived experience is treated as useful workplace knowledge.

Key message of this module



Fast-track checklists help employers move from intention to action.

Use the four checklists above for recruitment and selection, digital and IT access, workplace and facilities, and onboarding and management. Inclusion is easier when it is planned. A good checklist helps employers remember the small actions that make a big difference.

Module 07

Monitoring and Learning

Simple ways to know whether inclusion efforts are working

Hiring a blind or low-vision employee is only the first step. To know whether inclusion efforts are working, employers need simple ways to check progress and learn. This module provides a practical, low-burden approach that any organisation can use.

Why monitoring matters

Without simple checks, good intentions can fade after the first few weeks. Monitoring helps employers:

- Identify remaining barriers early, before they affect performance or retention
- Celebrate what is working and share success with the wider team
- Improve systems for future hires
- Demonstrate genuine commitment rather than one-off actions

Monitoring should be light, respectful, and focused on systems and support, not on scrutinising the individual employee more than others.

Simple 90-day check-in framework

Use these three short check-ins after a new blind or low-vision employee joins:

Week 1 check-in (first 5–7 working days) 01

Focus: Access and orientation

- Has the employee received all necessary logins, tools and accessible documents?
- Is the physical orientation complete and is the workspace usable?
- Are there any unexpected barriers in systems, documents or communication?
- Does the employee feel comfortable raising issues?

Action: Fix any immediate access problems within the next few days.

Day 30 check-in (end of first month) 02

Focus: Support and early performance

- Are the agreed reasonable accommodations working as intended?
- Is the employee receiving the same quality of information and opportunities as colleagues?
- How is the team adapting its communication and document-sharing habits?
- Are there any transport or timing issues that need practical adjustment?

Action: Adjust accommodations or processes if needed. Confirm that professional expectations remain clear and fair.

Day 90 check-in (end of first three months) 03

Focus: Retention, growth and system improvement

- Is the employee performing against the same role standards used for others?
- Has the employee been included in team activities, training and informal communication?
- What has the organisation learned that can improve future recruitment and onboarding?
- Would the employee recommend the organisation as an inclusive workplace? (Ask respectfully)

Action: Document lessons learned. Update checklists or onboarding materials if useful. Discuss growth opportunities with the employee.

Quick monitoring questions for managers

Managers can use these four questions in regular one-to-ones:

- Is there anything about how we share information or organise work that is making your job harder than it needs to be?
- Are the tools and adjustments we put in place still working well for you?
- Is there any training, system or process that would help you contribute more fully?
- How can the team continue to improve how we work together?

These questions treat the employee as a professional colleague and keep the focus on systems rather than personal ability.

What success looks like

Success is not only that a person was hired. Success includes:

- The employee can perform the essential duties of the role with the agreed adjustments
- The employee is retained and has equal access to training and development
- Team communication and document practices have improved for everyone
- Managers feel more confident about inclusive recruitment and support
- The organisation is ready to hire the next person with less hesitation and better systems

If after 90 days the employee is performing well and barriers have been reduced, the inclusion effort is working. If barriers remain, treat them as system problems to solve, not as personal failings.

Key message of this module



Simple, respectful monitoring protects both the employee and the organisation.

It turns a one-time hiring decision into lasting inclusive practice. Use the 90-day framework, ask open questions, fix barriers quickly, and keep professional standards fair. Learning from each hire makes the next one easier.

Sources and Further Reading

This toolkit draws on established international and national frameworks, research, and practical resources. The following sources are recommended for employers, HR professionals and researchers who want to go deeper.

Legal and policy frameworks

- Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, No. 28 of 1996 (Sri Lanka), especially Section 23.
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), particularly Article 27 (Work and employment) and General Comment No. 6 on equality and non-discrimination.
- Sri Lanka's National Action Plan for Disability and related policies of the National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities.

Evidence on accommodations and costs

- Job Accommodation Network (JAN). "Accommodation and Compliance: Low Cost, High Impact." Latest employer survey findings on the cost and benefits of workplace accommodations. Available at askjan.org.
- International Labour Organization (ILO). Disability inclusion resources and the Global Business and Disability Network principles.

Census and labour market data

- Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka. Census of Population and Housing 2012 – Disability statistics (70.9% of persons with disabilities of employment age not engaged in economic activity).

Practical guidance and standards

- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 – for digital accessibility of websites, documents and internal systems.
- ILO and employers' organisations guidance on inclusive recruitment and reasonable accommodation.

Lived experience and co-design approaches

- Participatory and co-design methodologies that centre the expertise of persons with disabilities (recommended for any organisation developing further resources).
- Project VIEW materials and audio workplace-readiness lessons (English, Sinhala and Tamil).

Employers are encouraged to treat these sources as starting points. Local organisations listed in Module 5 remain the most practical first contacts for day-to-day support and candidate matching in Sri Lanka.

Conclusion

Blind and low-vision inclusion is not about charity. It is about recognising ability, removing unnecessary barriers, and giving capable people a fair chance to contribute. For employers in Sri Lanka, it is also a practical opportunity to access talent, strengthen teams, improve workplace systems, and build a stronger reputation.

This toolkit has provided clear facts, practical steps, and ready-to-use tools. You now have the business case, clarity on common myths, guidance on inclusive recruitment (including specific actions for women and rural candidates), advice on digital and physical accommodations, an overview of the legal and local support system, fast-track checklists, and a simple monitoring framework to keep inclusion on track.

The most important step is the first one. Review one job advertisement. Make one document accessible. Ask one candidate what support they need. Use one checklist from Module 6. Hold one 90-day check-in. Contact one local organisation or the Department of Social Services Employment Support Unit. Small actions create real change.

Do not wait until everything is perfect to start inclusion. Waiting for the perfect system, the perfect budget, the perfect training, or the perfect time often means capable people continue to be left out. Inclusive employment begins with the willingness to start, learn, adjust, and improve along the way.

Sri Lanka has talented blind and low-vision people who are ready to work. Fair workplaces need employers who are ready to open doors.

Start now.

About the Founder and Project Lead



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Tuan Rushdi is the Founder and Project Lead of Project VIEW. He is a disability inclusion and employment specialist, AI productivity trainer, active researcher in non-visual AI productivity, and expert in employability skills development for persons with disabilities. He currently works actively across the South Asia region to promote employment for persons with disabilities.

He brings practical knowledge from disability inclusion initiatives in highly developed countries as well as deep, hands-on experience in Sri Lanka across various disabilities. He has lived experience of working in the corporate sector as a blind professional and holds leadership positions in local and international disability organisations. He combines this with expertise in digital accessibility, assistive technology, and inclusive training.

He holds a BSc (Hons) in Management Information Systems from University College Dublin, Ireland, and a Master of Disability Policy and Practice from Flinders University, South Australia. Through Project VIEW he brings together lived experience, professional practice, and inclusive design to create practical resources that support both employers and blind and low-vision job seekers.