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AccessPro

Advancing Accessibility and Professional Skills for the Visually Impaired

TOOLBOX FOR EMPLOYMENT AND
DIGITAL SKILL ENHANCEMENT FOR VIPS



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Chapter 1: Introduction & How to Use This Toolbox

This toolbox has been developed as part of the AccessPro project, an Erasmus+ initiative focused on improving the employability and digital competencies of visually impaired persons (VIPs) across Europe. It is intended as a practical, user-centered resource, offering accessible tools, strategies, and instructions that directly address the real challenges VIPs face when entering or navigating the labor market.

The primary objective is to close the gap between existing digital tools and the specific needs of visually impaired individuals in professional environments. At the same time, the toolbox serves as a reference point for vocational education and training (VET) professionals, trainers, and employers who aim to provide more inclusive support.

This resource does not attempt to provide an exhaustive list of all assistive technologies available. Instead, it focuses on tools that are functional, widely used, and applicable to core employment and training tasks – email communication, document creation, online job searching, digital collaboration, scheduling, and navigation of common software platforms.

Each chapter of this toolbox targets a thematic area:

- Digital literacy and foundational skills
- Communication and collaboration tools
- Job search preparation and application strategies
- Workplace productivity software and services
- Legal rights and workplace accessibility
- Advanced assistive tools
- Guidance on accessing support networks and ongoing learning opportunities

Readers are encouraged to approach the toolbox based on their personal or organizational goals. For instance, a job seeker unfamiliar with screen readers can begin with the chapter on digital basics. A VET trainer may focus on the section dealing with productivity tools to understand how to adapt their teaching methods. Chapters can be read in sequence or accessed independently.

Each tool or resource is presented in a consistent structure:

1. A brief explanation of what the tool does and what needs it addresses.
2. Step-by-step instructions for basic use, designed for screen reader compatibility.
3. Accessibility notes, highlighting known strengths or limitations for VIPs.



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4. Practical tips or common errors to avoid, based on user experience.
5. Links to official websites, tutorials, or user communities.

The content is formatted in accessible layouts. All chapters are available in digital formats that support screen reader navigation, and the complete toolbox will also be made available in braille, large print, and audio versions, coordinated by CBU (Croatian Blind Union).

Users should also be aware that while every effort has been made to ensure relevance and usability, software updates and accessibility improvements may impact the functionality of listed tools. Therefore, readers are encouraged to verify current features where necessary and use the toolbox as a starting point for deeper exploration, rather than a final destination.

If you're reading this as a VIP, our goal is for this toolbox to help you perform key tasks more independently and confidently in a professional setting. If you're a trainer or educator, we hope it helps you bridge the accessibility gap in your instruction. And if you're an employer or policymaker, we believe this can serve as a practical guide to creating more inclusive workplaces, supported by real-world tools and examples.



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Chapter 2: Digital Basics for Everyday Use

Developing digital skills is often the first – and most significant – barrier visually impaired persons (VIPs) must overcome on their path to employment. Before engaging with workplace tools or advanced applications, VIPs must be confident in their ability to use a computer or smartphone to perform simple yet critical daily tasks: writing an email, browsing the internet, filling out a form, opening a document, or organizing files. These skills form the base upon which all other professional competencies are built.

This chapter focuses on the fundamental technologies and methods that enable visually impaired users to interact with digital environments. While there are many tools available, this section emphasizes what is both commonly used and practically useful in training and work settings.

Keyboard Navigation and Shortcuts

Keyboard navigation is essential for anyone who cannot rely on a mouse or visual cues. For blind users, and for many low-vision users who prefer not to use a screen magnifier, the keyboard is the primary tool for controlling software, operating systems, and web browsers.

Unlike mouse-based input, which requires hand-eye coordination and visual precision, keyboard commands are consistent and predictable. Mastery of these commands enables users to perform complex tasks efficiently, even in unfamiliar environments.

On Windows systems, for example, users can switch between open applications by pressing Alt and Tab together. Pressing Windows and D minimizes all windows and brings the user to the desktop, while Alt and F4 closes the currently active window. These shortcuts allow a user to manage their workspace without relying on visual identification of windows or icons.

In web browsers, common commands such as Ctrl and T to open a new tab, Ctrl and W to close one, or Ctrl and L to jump to the address bar, allow for smooth browsing. For form navigation, pressing Tab moves forward through input fields, while Shift and Tab goes backward. These are essential in online job applications, email platforms, and web-based training tools.

macOS users will find similar functionality through the Command (⌘) key. For instance, Command and Tab cycles through applications, while Command and Q



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quits the current app. VoiceOver users on Mac can also take advantage of VoiceOver-specific commands layered on top of standard navigation keys.

For learners just beginning to use keyboard shortcuts, the best approach is to focus on five or six essential commands and practice them daily. After a week or two of consistent use, additional shortcuts can be added gradually. Over time, this method leads to a deeply ingrained fluency in keyboard control, greatly improving speed and independence.

Screen Readers

For blind users, screen readers are not optional – they are the central interface between user and machine. A screen reader is software that converts on-screen content into spoken feedback or output to a braille display. It reads not just text, but interface elements, form labels, menus, headings, links, and notifications.

There are several screen readers in wide use today. NVDA (NonVisual Desktop Access) is a free, open-source tool for Windows that is both powerful and lightweight. JAWS (Job Access With Speech), also for Windows, is a commercial product with an advanced feature set, often used in workplace settings where institutional licenses are available. On Apple devices, VoiceOver is built in and tightly integrated with both macOS and iOS. Android users can access similar functionality through TalkBack, which has matured significantly in recent years.

Learning to use a screen reader is comparable to learning a new language. It requires time and consistent practice, beginning with fundamental concepts such as reading by character, word, or line. From there, users can progress to advanced navigation, such as jumping between headings or landmarks on a webpage, or efficiently filling out complex forms.

New users often struggle with information overload at first. Screen readers tend to speak a great deal, and without context, it can feel overwhelming. Adjusting the speech rate to a comfortable speed, turning off unnecessary announcements, and focusing practice on a few key functions per session can make the learning curve more manageable.

Most screen reader developers provide extensive documentation and free training materials. For NVDA and JAWS, there are complete user guides and tutorial videos. Apple and Google also offer structured lessons for VoiceOver and TalkBack, respectively. These should be consulted regularly, especially when software is updated or when switching between applications.



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Trainers working with VIPs should allocate dedicated sessions to help learners master screen reader fundamentals. Progress should be measured not just by the ability to hear content, but by the user's ability to locate, understand, and interact with that content effectively.

Magnification and Visual Adjustments

Not all VIPs are blind. Many have low vision, and for this group, screen magnification tools are often more appropriate than screen readers. These tools enlarge portions of the screen, increase contrast, and help distinguish content that might otherwise be unreadable.

On Windows, the built-in Magnifier can be activated using the Windows and Plus keys. It offers several viewing modes: full screen, which zooms everything; lens, which magnifies only a small portion around the cursor; and docked, which shows a zoomed-in strip at the top of the screen while keeping the rest at normal size. Users can customize magnification levels, start-up behavior, and even invert colors for better readability.

macOS offers a similar tool called Zoom, which can be enabled from the Accessibility settings. It supports smooth, dynamic scaling and can be controlled via keyboard commands. macOS also allows for high-contrast modes, grayscale settings, and cursor enlargement, all of which can help reduce eye strain and improve usability.

In web browsers, zoom settings can be changed on a per-site basis. This is especially useful when filling out online forms or reading articles. By pressing Control and Plus, users can increase page size; Control and Zero resets it. These commands work in most modern browsers, including Chrome, Firefox, Edge, and Safari.

Adjusting text and background contrast is also important. Users may prefer high-contrast themes, which display light text on a dark background or vice versa. Some operating systems allow the customization of color schemes and font sizes globally, making every application easier to read.

While screen magnifiers are relatively easy to use, they require spatial awareness and can cause motion sickness in some users when moved rapidly. Therefore, new users should take frequent breaks and start with modest zoom levels until they are comfortable.



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Voice Input and Dictation

Dictation technologies allow users to speak to their device rather than type. This is particularly helpful for VIPs who experience eye fatigue, limited hand dexterity, or simply prefer speech-based input.

On Windows, dictation can be enabled by pressing Windows and H. This launches a speech bar that can be used in most text fields, including word processors, browsers, and messaging apps. macOS users can turn on dictation from System Settings under the Keyboard section. Once activated, pressing the Function key twice starts voice input.

Google Docs includes a Voice Typing tool under the “Tools” menu, which works well in the Chrome browser. On smartphones, voice input is usually available via the keyboard’s microphone icon.

While dictation tools have improved significantly, they are not perfect. Speech recognition errors are common, especially with proper nouns, accents, or background noise. Users must also speak punctuation out loud – saying “period,” “comma,” or “new line” where needed. Proofreading is always required after dictating text.

Despite these limitations, voice input can be a valuable alternative. It is particularly useful for drafting ideas quickly, taking notes, or composing longer emails without typing. New users should begin by dictating simple messages, reviewing the output, and slowly building trust in the system.

Email and Web Basics

Independent communication and online research are essential for modern work. The ability to send and receive emails, browse websites, and use online services confidently allows VIPs to apply for jobs, follow training, and participate fully in the digital economy.

Most visually impaired users begin with web-based email platforms like Gmail or Outlook. These platforms are largely accessible and compatible with screen readers. Gmail offers a simplified HTML view, which strips away unnecessary layout elements and is particularly useful when using a screen reader. Learning to navigate to the compose button, input recipients, write the subject line, and attach files are core competencies every learner should master.



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Using browser-based email requires familiarity with web navigation. VIPs must understand how to move between headings, use form labels, and identify buttons through screen reader feedback. It is helpful to practice filling out email forms repeatedly until the process becomes second nature.

General web browsing involves even more complexity. Users must be able to locate and interpret links, skip navigation menus, and avoid distractions such as ads or pop-ups. Knowing how to search effectively, recognize safe websites, and complete online forms is essential.

To improve the browsing experience, users can install reader extensions that simplify page layouts, or use built-in reader modes in browsers like Safari and Firefox. These tools extract just the main content of a page, removing clutter that may confuse screen readers or low-vision users.

Confidence in email and web navigation opens the door to many other digital activities. VIPs who can handle these tasks independently are better prepared to participate in remote work, online training, and modern office environments.



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Chapter 3: Communication & Collaboration Tools

Modern workplaces and training environments rely heavily on digital communication. Email is no longer the only tool in use – instant messaging platforms, video conferencing software, shared calendars, and cloud-based document systems have become essential for daily operations.

For visually impaired individuals, access to these tools is critical – not only to perform basic tasks but also to engage as full participants in collaborative work. Yet many of these platforms were not originally designed with accessibility in mind. Today, the situation is improving, but challenges remain.

This chapter focuses on commonly used communication and collaboration tools that are accessible or adaptable for VIPs. Each section offers guidance on what to use, how to use it effectively, and how to avoid common barriers.

Email Clients and Webmail Platforms

Email remains a primary method of professional communication, and it's often the first channel used for job applications, meeting coordination, or client interaction. For VIPs, it is important to choose an email platform that integrates well with screen readers or magnifiers and has a simple, keyboard-navigable interface.

Gmail is one of the most widely used platforms. For accessibility, Gmail offers a simplified HTML version, which removes visual clutter and is easier to navigate using screen readers like NVDA or JAWS. Users can navigate through tabs using the keyboard – Tab and Shift+Tab move between fields, while Ctrl+Enter sends the message. Gmail also allows customization of keyboard shortcuts for frequent actions such as composing, replying, or archiving messages.

Microsoft Outlook is another popular choice, especially in professional environments. The desktop version is generally more accessible than the web version, though both support screen reader interaction. Users benefit from consistent layouts and shortcut keys for tasks like creating a new email, searching folders, or scheduling meetings. Outlook's calendar integration is also useful for organizing workdays and receiving reminders.

Mozilla Thunderbird is an open-source alternative with strong accessibility support. It is especially popular among users who prefer lightweight applications and extensive customization options.



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VIPs should be encouraged to practice composing emails with attachments, navigating their inbox, and managing folders independently. Trainers can support this by introducing tasks that simulate realistic work conditions – such as replying to interview requests or following up on project updates.

Messaging Platforms: Slack, Microsoft Teams, and WhatsApp

Instant messaging has replaced many traditional email threads in collaborative teams. Platforms like Slack and Microsoft Teams allow users to communicate in real time, share files, and organize conversations into channels or topics.

Slack, while popular, has mixed accessibility reviews. The desktop app has improved its screen reader support, especially when using NVDA or JAWS, but some keyboard commands remain inconsistent. Navigating channels, switching between conversations, and reading message threads can be achieved with a screen reader, but it requires familiarity with Slack's layout and keyboard structure.

Microsoft Teams offers stronger accessibility features. The application supports screen reader navigation for chat, calendar, and file tabs. Teams' integration with other Microsoft products (like Word or Excel) also allows for seamless sharing and editing of documents. Keyboard shortcuts are well-documented and allow users to access key features without a mouse. For instance, pressing Ctrl+E lets the user search across all chats and channels, while Ctrl+Shift+C starts a call.

WhatsApp Web and the desktop app are relatively straightforward to use with screen readers. While designed primarily for casual messaging, WhatsApp is increasingly used in informal team settings and remote work environments. Screen reader users can navigate chats, type messages, and listen to voice notes without difficulty.

The key to using messaging platforms effectively lies in consistency and clarity. VIPs should be encouraged to ask for or establish good communication practices within their teams, such as using clear subject lines, avoiding excessive use of emojis or shorthand, and labeling shared files descriptively.

Video Conferencing Tools: Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet

Video conferencing is now a routine part of professional life. For VIPs, it presents both opportunities and challenges. While these platforms generally support screen reader access, the visual nature of meetings – screen sharing, slideshows, raised hands – can be harder to follow without adaptation.



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Zoom is widely used and offers relatively good accessibility. Screen reader users can access menus, join meetings, mute/unmute themselves, and navigate participant lists using keyboard commands. Zoom also provides hotkeys to raise hands (Alt+Y), mute/unmute (Alt+A), and access chat (Alt+H), which are especially helpful in meetings with large groups.

Microsoft Teams integrates video conferencing into the same interface as its chat and collaboration features. This can make it easier for users who already work within the Teams environment. Meeting invitations, calendar entries, and shared notes are unified in one space. Users can join meetings with a single shortcut and navigate shared content using arrow keys or screen reader navigation commands.

Google Meet has improved its accessibility, but it remains less consistent across browsers and operating systems. It works best in Google Chrome, where users can use screen reader commands to mute themselves, open the chat, or follow screen sharing. That said, Google Meet has fewer keyboard shortcuts than Zoom or Teams, which may limit fast interaction.

Trainers and educators should ensure that VIPs are given the opportunity to practice joining meetings, interacting with controls, and navigating chat or shared materials. Test environments – where mistakes can be made without consequence – are ideal for this kind of training.

Calendar and Scheduling Tools

Being able to manage time independently is a crucial part of employment. Most VIPs benefit from using digital calendars that support accessible navigation and clear reminders.

Outlook Calendar and Google Calendar are the most common tools in this category. Both support screen reader navigation, with event lists that can be browsed by day, week, or month. Outlook integrates calendar entries with email invitations, and events can be accepted or declined using keyboard commands.

Google Calendar offers strong integration with Gmail and Google Meet, allowing users to schedule and join video meetings from within their calendar. Screen reader users can navigate through the interface using headings and keyboard navigation. Reminders, recurring events, and notifications can all be set with just a few keystrokes.

Low-vision users can take advantage of color-coded events and zoom features, while blind users should focus on voice prompts and calendar alerts. Setting up



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recurring reminders and using mobile sync (with VoiceOver or TalkBack) can help users stay on track throughout the week.

Collaborative Documents: Google Workspace and Microsoft 365

Document collaboration is now central to many work environments. Google Docs, Sheets, and Slides allow multiple users to work on the same file in real time. These platforms offer strong accessibility support – especially in Chrome – and are regularly updated with new features.

Screen reader users can navigate documents, track changes, leave comments, and use voice typing. Keyboard shortcuts are essential here, as many functions are hidden in menus or require layered commands. Google provides detailed accessibility guides for each tool, which should be introduced early in the training process.

Microsoft 365 (Word, Excel, PowerPoint online) also supports collaboration and screen reader access. Unlike their desktop versions, the online versions are simplified and easier to use with assistive technologies. Microsoft also offers an accessibility checker that can be used to ensure that documents meet inclusive design standards – this is particularly helpful for VIPs who are producing content for wider audiences.

For trainers, these tools offer a way to teach both digital literacy and collaborative work habits. Real-time co-editing, feedback through comments, and the ability to track revisions create learning opportunities that mirror real workplace scenarios.



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Chapter 4: Job Readiness & Career Tools

While access to digital tools and workplace technologies is essential, successful employment for visually impaired persons (VIPs) begins earlier – with the job search itself. This chapter addresses the skills and tools needed to prepare for employment, including writing resumes, navigating job listings, completing applications, and preparing for interviews.

The job-seeking process often involves multiple digital steps: creating application documents, researching companies, submitting forms online, and participating in remote interviews. Each of these steps presents unique accessibility challenges, but they are manageable with the right preparation and tools.

This chapter outlines a practical path to employment readiness, focusing on accessible resources, software tools, and workflow strategies tailored for VIPs.

Creating Accessible and Effective CVs

A well-written CV (curriculum vitae) or résumé remains the most critical document in a job application. For VIPs, the challenge is twofold: crafting a compelling document that highlights relevant skills, and doing so using accessible tools that allow independent editing, formatting, and saving in the required formats.

Google Docs and Microsoft Word are both accessible and widely accepted by employers. Google Docs offers real-time saving, strong screen reader support (especially in Chrome), and easy sharing. Word, whether online or desktop, is equally viable and preferred by many employers.

For those new to resume writing, using a clean, text-based template is advisable. Over-designed formats with columns or graphics may confuse screen readers and are often filtered out by applicant tracking systems (ATS). Choose templates that use clear section headings, left-aligned text, and minimal visual elements. Most screen reader users benefit from building resumes line-by-line, using keyboard shortcuts for formatting (such as bold for section titles and bulleted lists for skills).

An important and highly useful option for job seekers in Europe is the **Europass CV**. This standardized CV format, supported by the European Commission, is accepted in many EU countries and especially helpful for cross-border applications. It allows individuals to present their qualifications, language skills, work experience, and digital competencies in a structured, consistent way.



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The Europass CV is available online through the official europa.eu/europass portal. The platform offers a step-by-step form that can be filled out directly in the browser. It supports screen reader navigation and keyboard input, although users should test compatibility with their chosen assistive technology. The finished CV can be downloaded as a PDF or stored in the user's Europass profile for future use. For VIPs applying to public institutions, training programs, or EU-funded initiatives, the Europass format is often expected.

Key content areas for any CV – whether custom-built or generated via Europass – should include contact details, a brief personal statement, work experience, education, and relevant digital or language skills. For VIPs entering the workforce for the first time or changing careers, volunteer work, informal projects, or training certifications (including screen reader proficiency) can demonstrate initiative and transferable skills.

It is also important to save resumes in the correct format. PDF is typically preferred for sharing, as it preserves layout. However, when using PDFs, make sure they are properly tagged for accessibility. Word and Google Docs both offer tools to export accessible PDFs. Trainers should demonstrate this process explicitly.

Cover Letters and Motivation Statements

While not always required, cover letters are still requested by many employers, especially in formal or nonprofit sectors. For VIPs, a cover letter is an opportunity to address potential questions about work style, explain gaps in employment, or highlight particular skills related to accessibility or resilience.

A good cover letter should follow a simple structure: introduction, explanation of why the applicant is a strong candidate, a short description of relevant experience, and a closing paragraph with availability and contact information. Clarity and conciseness are key. Avoid using templates that rely heavily on formatting; a plain text layout is sufficient.

Voice typing tools (such as Google Voice Typing or Windows Dictation) can be useful during the drafting phase but should always be followed by careful proofreading. Screen readers can assist in reviewing the flow and tone of the letter.

Accessible CV Builders and Online Tools

There are online tools that can simplify the resume-building process, but not all are fully accessible. For VIPs using screen readers, it is essential to choose platforms that are keyboard-navigable and compliant with web accessibility guidelines. Even



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visually appealing platforms may present significant navigation issues if they rely heavily on drag-and-drop elements or unlabelled form fields.

Accessible options include:

CV Maker (cvmkr.com): This platform offers a minimal and straightforward interface with basic templates. The absence of visual clutter makes it easier to use with screen readers, especially for users seeking a quick solution without signing up for an account.

Zety (zety.com): Zety provides a clean layout and guided step-by-step resume creation. While the editing environment is accessible in most cases, the final download typically requires a paid account. Screen reader users should test for compatibility before investing significant time into the platform.

LinkedIn Resume Builder: Integrated into the LinkedIn platform, this tool allows users to create a resume based on their existing LinkedIn profile. It is generally accessible and provides a fast way to convert an online profile into a shareable document. However, formatting options are limited, and manual edits may still be needed.

Europass CV (europa.eu/europass): The Europass platform, developed by the European Commission, offers a structured and standardized CV format widely recognized across Europe. The online builder guides users through each section with clear prompts and logical flow. It is compatible with screen readers and keyboard navigation, though some minor accessibility issues may still arise depending on the browser. Completed CVs can be saved in accessible PDF format or stored online for future use. This tool is especially useful for cross-border job applications, EU-funded program candidates, and users who benefit from a guided, highly organized format.

VIPs should approach these platforms with caution – test accessibility before entering large amounts of content, and always save a backup copy. For users with specific needs, or in cases where online builders prove frustrating, building a CV manually in Google Docs or Microsoft Word remains a fully viable and often more flexible alternative. Trainers and support professionals should be prepared to assist with reviewing automated formatting and ensuring that exported files meet accessibility standards.



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Finding Job Opportunities

Job search engines are often designed for visual interaction, but many now include accessibility features or are compatible with screen readers. VIPs can successfully search for and apply to jobs online by learning how to navigate listings, apply filters, and submit applications independently.

Websites such as Indeed, LinkedIn, and Glassdoor are commonly used across Europe. Among them, LinkedIn stands out for its growing accessibility focus. Users can filter job listings by location, job type, or required skills, and apply directly through the platform. LinkedIn also offers a “Job Alerts” feature, which can notify users of new opportunities matching their profile.

Indeed has a simple layout and is largely screen reader-compatible, although ads and sidebars may cause distractions. It supports keyboard navigation and allows users to upload resumes for faster applications. Some users prefer to apply directly on employer websites, which can be more accessible or more difficult depending on the employer's design choices.

VIPs should be trained to evaluate job listings critically – looking for clear role descriptions, realistic qualifications, and genuine contact details. Practicing how to fill out application forms in different formats (web forms, attached PDFs, email submissions) can also build confidence and reduce errors.

Preparing for Interviews (Including Remote Interviews)

Once an application leads to an interview, preparation becomes key. VIPs should anticipate both the standard challenges of job interviews and those related to technology access.

For in-person interviews, it is useful to confirm logistics in advance, including whether the location is physically accessible, whether printed materials are expected, and whether any accommodations are needed (e.g., additional time, audio formats, etc.).

For remote interviews – now increasingly common – preparation must include becoming familiar with video conferencing platforms. As covered in Chapter 3, VIPs should know how to join meetings, mute/unmute, use the chat function, and troubleshoot audio. Practicing these actions ahead of time using platforms like Zoom or Teams is strongly recommended.



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Trainers can support interview preparation through mock interviews. These sessions should simulate real conditions, including introductions, situational questions, and follow-up discussions. Mock interviews should also include time for debriefing, where the VIP can reflect on their communication style, clarity of answers, and technical performance.

VIPs should also be prepared to discuss their preferred working methods. Employers may ask how a candidate would complete tasks that are typically visual (e.g., reading reports, reviewing spreadsheets). Having clear, confident answers – explaining the use of screen readers, magnifiers, or assistive apps – can help build credibility and reduce employer uncertainty.

It is also important to be aware of legal rights. In many European countries, employers are not allowed to ask questions about disability unless they directly relate to essential job functions. VIPs should feel empowered to disclose their needs on their own terms and at a time of their choosing.



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Chapter 5: Workplace Digital Skills

Employment today requires more than technical qualifications or interpersonal skills – it demands digital fluency. Visually impaired persons (VIPs) are expected to navigate the same tools as their sighted peers: file systems, email platforms, collaboration software, digital calendars, and cloud-based storage. Mastery of these tools allows VIPs not only to contribute productively to their teams but also to advocate for accessibility in broader workplace practices.

This chapter outlines essential digital competencies required in the modern workplace. It provides detailed, practical instructions on using widely adopted platforms and explains how VIPs can work efficiently with assistive technologies.

Document Creation and Word Processing

Word processing is one of the most basic, yet most essential digital skills in any office setting. VIPs will frequently be expected to draft reports, internal memos, meeting notes, and formal correspondence. These documents must be both readable and professionally formatted.

Microsoft Word is the most commonly used word processor in European workplaces. For VIPs using screen readers such as JAWS or NVDA, virtually all Word features are accessible. Navigating the interface efficiently requires understanding how to move between tabs on the ribbon using the Alt key followed by assigned letters (for example, Alt followed by N accesses the "Insert" tab). Keyboard shortcuts are key to productivity. Common commands like Ctrl + B to bold text, Ctrl + S to save, or Ctrl + K to insert hyperlinks should become second nature.

A screen reader user must also learn to work with styles, not simply apply visual formatting. Heading styles (Heading 1, Heading 2) allow not just consistent layout but also efficient navigation within longer documents, using keyboard shortcuts or document outlines. VIPs should practice assigning headings, inserting page breaks, adjusting paragraph spacing, and using the "Find" function to move through a document quickly.

Google Docs provides a similar environment in a web-based setting, with the added benefit of real-time collaboration. It is compatible with most screen readers, especially when accessed using Google Chrome. Within Google Docs, screen reader users can activate a dedicated accessibility mode and benefit from real-time notifications of edits or comments. However, some complex features – such as image formatting or embedded tables – can be less efficient compared to Word.



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Training exercises should go beyond simple typing. VIPs should be guided to produce a two-page formatted document using proper headings, bulleted or numbered lists, a simple table, and a citation or reference section. They should be able to share the document with a colleague, receive feedback in the form of comments, and respond or edit accordingly. Saving or exporting to PDF format – and ensuring that PDF is properly tagged for accessibility – is also an essential part of document preparation.

Working with Spreadsheets

While spreadsheets are inherently visual, they are indispensable in modern administrative, financial, and technical roles. VIPs must be able to perform at least intermediate-level tasks with spreadsheets to be competitive in many job settings.

In Microsoft Excel, screen readers can read cell references, values, and formulas aloud. VIPs should learn to navigate cells horizontally and vertically using arrow keys while identifying content and structure. When entering formulas, such as summing a column of numbers, the screen reader reads both the formula and the result aloud, allowing for immediate feedback.

Understanding the logical layout of a spreadsheet is critical. Rows and columns should have clear, consistent headers. VIPs must avoid common accessibility issues such as merged cells or visually hidden notes. Practice should include building a sheet from scratch with labeled columns for expenses, dates, and categories, entering sample data, and calculating totals using the SUM function. Once this foundation is secure, users can learn to sort data alphabetically or numerically, filter records by criteria (for example, filtering a task list by status), and use simple conditional logic with IF statements.

Google Sheets offers many of the same capabilities in a cloud-based format. It allows multiple users to work on the same file, with screen reader feedback on changes. However, Sheets relies more heavily on internet connectivity and has more limited support for advanced Excel features. Navigation and editing are otherwise very similar, especially for data entry and basic formulas.

VIPs should also become familiar with spreadsheet formatting – applying currency symbols, date formats, and percentage displays using keyboard commands. These visual cues often serve as important indicators for other collaborators and contribute to the professional appearance of the document.

Training should simulate realistic use cases, such as maintaining a work schedule, tracking reimbursements, or compiling a project checklist. Structured exercises allow



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learners to gradually build confidence while learning how to avoid or troubleshoot accessibility barriers in complex spreadsheets.

Managing Files and Cloud Storage

The ability to create, locate, and share files is fundamental to digital independence. Without these skills, VIPs may find themselves dependent on colleagues for basic actions like locating a document or saving a version correctly – hindering both productivity and confidence.

Google Drive is a widely used cloud storage platform that allows users to store, access, and share files across devices. VIPs using screen readers can navigate the folder structure using arrow keys and activate files using Enter. The platform also provides keyboard shortcuts for key actions like uploading a file or creating a new folder. A well-organized folder hierarchy is essential. Files should be clearly named (e.g., "ClientReport_March2025.docx") to support easy identification using screen readers and search functions.

OneDrive, Microsoft's cloud platform, is integrated directly into Windows File Explorer. VIPs can use traditional file management techniques – such as keyboard shortcuts to cut, copy, and paste – while maintaining synchronized access across their devices. Files can be shared by right-clicking (or keyboard equivalent) and selecting sharing permissions, such as view-only or edit access. Learning how to set sharing expiration dates and password protections is also valuable in client-facing roles.

VIPs must also understand the difference between local and cloud copies of files, especially when working offline. Accidentally working on outdated or unsynced versions of documents can lead to data loss or confusion in team settings. File version history, available in most platforms, should be reviewed and used when necessary to restore or compare older document states.

A good training sequence might include setting up a project folder, organizing subfolders by task or phase, sharing one document with comment-only permissions, and another with full editing access, and then reviewing the activity history to identify changes made by collaborators.

Calendars and Time Management

In many work environments, being punctual and organized is as important as performing specific tasks. VIPs who can manage their time independently reduce the need for reminders or supervision and are seen as reliable contributors.



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Google Calendar is a preferred tool for many because of its straightforward interface and integration with Gmail. For VIPs using screen readers, the "Schedule" view provides a list-based format that is easier to navigate than grid views. Users can create events, invite guests by email address, add video conferencing links, and set reminders that appear as pop-ups, emails, or mobile notifications. Events can be customized for time zones, recurrence (such as weekly meetings), and color-coded categories.

Outlook Calendar offers similar features with tighter integration into corporate environments. When an email contains a meeting invitation, a screen reader user can accept or decline directly from their inbox, and the event is automatically added to their calendar. Outlook also allows quick switching between day, week, and month views using the keyboard and provides reminders by default for all events.

VIPs should build routines around calendar use – reviewing the week ahead every Monday, checking each morning for upcoming events, and blocking off time for focused work sessions. These habits prevent scheduling conflicts, reduce stress, and improve accountability.

Trainers should guide VIPs through hands-on practice by creating sample meetings, inviting others, adding notes or files to events, and setting recurring appointments such as "Weekly Team Check-In." Syncing the calendar with mobile devices should also be included in training, as many VIPs rely on real-time alerts delivered via screen reader-compatible mobile apps.

Communication During Work

Communication is at the heart of collaboration, and VIPs must often navigate multiple platforms simultaneously – email, instant messaging, calls, and shared documents – while staying organized and responsive.

Using email effectively involves more than reading and replying. VIPs should be able to search for past messages using keywords or sender names, use filters to show only unread or flagged items, and create folders to archive correspondence by topic or project. Features like message flags, categories, or follow-up reminders can help prioritize important emails. Learning how to manage attachments, forward messages with context, and write subject lines that reflect the content clearly are all essential professional habits.

Platforms like Microsoft Teams or Slack are common for instant communication. VIPs must learn to switch quickly between chats, channels, and files. In Teams, for instance, the use of the Tab key allows movement between sections, while Ctrl + E



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opens the universal search bar. Raising hands, muting/unmuting, and typing in chat during a call should be practiced until it becomes second nature.

Many workplaces also expect employees to manage communication across time zones or cultural contexts. VIPs should be comfortable drafting concise messages, confirming details in writing after meetings, and asking for accessible versions of visual content when needed. It is not unreasonable to request a written summary of a whiteboard session or an email recap after a brainstorming meeting.

Advanced training can simulate real-time collaboration under pressure. For example, a task might involve joining a Teams meeting, editing a shared document during the call, responding to a chat message, and emailing a summary afterward. Practicing this kind of task flow builds the skills necessary to succeed in dynamic, fast-paced work environments.



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Chapter 6: Legal Rights & Workplace Accessibility

Overview of Disability and Employment Rights in the EU

Persons with disabilities represent a significant portion of the European Union's population, with approximately 87 million citizens living with some form of disability. The EU recognizes the importance of including these individuals in the labor market and ensuring equality and non-discrimination. Disability rights in employment are grounded in European laws, policies, and strategies that protect and promote their participation in social and professional life.

Legal Framework

The legal framework for disability rights in employment is established through several key instruments. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) explicitly prohibits discrimination based on disability and empowers the EU to adopt legislation that prevents discrimination and promotes equality in the labor market. Complementing this, Article 26 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union guarantees the right of persons with disabilities to measures that ensure their independence, social and professional integration, and participation in community life. Furthermore, the EU ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2010, committing itself and its Member States to safeguard and improve the rights of persons with disabilities, including their right to work and fair employment conditions.

Directive on Equal Treatment in Employment

A cornerstone of EU legislation in this field is the Directive on Equal Treatment in Employment (2000/78/EC), which prohibits discrimination on grounds of disability in employment, training, working conditions, promotion, and dismissal. The directive ensures that persons with disabilities have equal access to employment and professional development. It also obliges employers to provide reasonable accommodations, such as adapting working hours, ensuring accessibility of premises, or providing assistive technologies. Failure to make such reasonable adjustments is considered discrimination under EU law.

EU Policies and Strategies

To further promote employment inclusion, the EU has adopted policies such as the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030. This strategy focuses on increasing employment rates among persons with disabilities, enhancing support services like counseling and mentoring, and encouraging inclusive labor markets and social economy initiatives. The European Pillar of Social Rights reinforces this



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approach by highlighting the right of persons with disabilities to equal access to work, education, and services.

Practical Challenges

Despite this comprehensive legal and policy framework, persons with disabilities face ongoing challenges in employment. Their employment rate in the EU remains around 50%, notably lower than the general population average of approximately 75%. Barriers such as inaccessible workplaces, lack of appropriate accommodations, and prejudices persist. Many employers are unaware of how to support disabled employees effectively, and access to support services like assistance and vocational training is often limited. Addressing these challenges requires continuous cooperation between the EU, national governments, employers, and civil society, alongside ongoing education and promotion of inclusive workplace practices.

Employment Support Measures

To complement legislation, many Member States provide additional employment support measures. These include subsidies for hiring persons with disabilities, rights to personal or job assistants, availability of protected or integrative workplaces, and opportunities for training and lifelong learning. The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) plays a vital role in financing such initiatives, aiming to improve social inclusion and labor market access.

Guidelines for Accessible Workplaces for Persons with Disabilities in the European Union

The aim of these guidelines is to assist employers, institutions, and decision-makers in creating work environments that are inclusive, fair, and accessible for persons with disabilities. An accessible workplace ensures not only physical access but also full participation and equal opportunities for all employees. The European Union (EU) recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to equal access to employment and the necessity to provide accessible, inclusive, and safe workplaces. These guidelines are grounded in European legislation, including the EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030 and the Directive 2000/78/EC on Equal Treatment in Employment.

Accessibility of the Work Environment

Ensuring physical accessibility is a fundamental requirement. Workplaces must provide access to all areas such as entrances, corridors, sanitary facilities, and



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elevators. Accessibility measures may include tactile guide paths, Braille signage, and orientation tactile maps, in line with the European Accessibility Act (Directive (EU) 2019/882), which harmonizes accessibility requirements across products and services in the EU. Architectural barriers such as stairs without ramps or high thresholds must be removed to guarantee free movement. Moreover, workstations should be adapted to meet diverse physical, sensory, intellectual, and other needs by providing ergonomic furniture, mobility aids, hearing and visual assistive devices.

Digital accessibility is equally crucial. Information and communication technologies used in the workplace must comply with recognized standards such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1, ensuring that internal networks, emails, and documents are compatible with screen readers and other assistive technologies. Employees should also have access to training and technical support for digital tools to enable full participation.

Reasonable Accommodation

According to EU legislation and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, Article 27), employers are required to provide reasonable accommodations enabling persons with disabilities to perform their job duties under equal conditions. Such accommodations include flexible working hours or teleworking options, adjustments in communication methods (e.g., sign language interpreters), modifications in job descriptions or tasks in consultation with employees, and provision of additional time for task completion if necessary. Failure to provide reasonable accommodations is regarded as discrimination under the Directive 2000/78/EC.

Employment and Recruitment Procedures

Recruitment processes must be accessible, both physically and digitally. Job advertisements should be clear, concise, and free from discriminatory language. The principle of non-discrimination and positive action may apply, whereby persons with disabilities are given equal opportunity or priority in hiring under equal terms. Candidates should be allowed to use assistive technologies during selection procedures, and assessment methods should be diversified to avoid exclusion based on disability.

Workplace Support

An effective support system is essential to sustain employment of persons with disabilities. This includes access to job coaches, workplace mentors, and designated contact persons for disability-related issues. Ongoing training for management and coworkers about disability inclusion and rights, aligned with the European Pillar of



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Social Rights (Principle 17), promotes a workplace culture of equality, respect, and non-discrimination.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The effectiveness of accessibility measures should be systematically monitored and evaluated. Transparency about rights, policies, and employer decisions should be guaranteed for all employees. Employee feedback, especially from persons with disabilities, is vital for continuous improvement. Compliance with national laws and EU legislation on equality and accessibility must be regularly reviewed to maintain high standards.

In conclusion, accessible workplaces are essential for the full realization of the right to work, independence, and equal societal participation of persons with disabilities. The implementation of these guidelines not only benefits employees with disabilities but also fosters a more inclusive, diverse, and equitable work environment for all. These efforts reflect the EU's broader commitment to social justice and inclusion as enshrined in its fundamental legal and policy frameworks.

Assistive Technology Policies

In modern workplaces, assistive technology is no longer a luxury but a necessity for creating equitable employment conditions for visually impaired individuals. These technologies enable not only basic access to digital tools but also support advanced productivity, especially in knowledge-intensive roles. For blind and low-vision professionals, assistive technologies form the foundation of workplace inclusion and equal opportunity.

The Importance of Clear Policies

Developing and maintaining clear policies on assistive technology is crucial to ensure that visually impaired employees can access, use, and benefit from digital tools in a way that addresses both their individual needs and the organization's objectives. Such policies are designed to align with national disability rights legislation and European directives that promote equal treatment in employment.

Role of Employers and Institutions

Employers and institutions play a central role in the success of assistive technology policies. Effective policies should be incorporated into organizational procedures and include several key elements. First, needs assessment protocols are essential, involving a structured evaluation of the job role and working environment, carried out



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in collaboration with the visually impaired employee, accessibility experts, and when appropriate, representatives from blind associations or rehabilitation centers. Second, clear procedures for the procurement, installation, and maintenance of assistive devices must be established, including guidelines for device ownership and replacement. Third, ongoing training and technical support should be provided not only to visually impaired employees but also to colleagues and IT staff, ensuring compatibility and smooth collaboration. Finally, data privacy and security must be addressed, particularly when assistive technologies use audio input/output or scanning capabilities, ensuring compliance with organizational policies on data protection.

In larger organizations, appointing a dedicated Accessibility Officer can be beneficial. This individual would oversee and support the implementation of inclusive technology policies, working closely with employees to promote accessibility across the workplace.

Purpose and Benefits of Assistive Technology Policies

The core purpose of assistive technology policies is to remove unnecessary barriers and create a framework for reasonable accommodations, as mandated by EU and national laws. Well-structured policies clarify the responsibilities of both employers and employees, promote consistency in how accommodations are assessed and provided, protect the rights of visually impaired individuals without segregating them, and facilitate the seamless integration of assistive tools into everyday workflows. Assistive technologies vary widely, from screen readers and braille displays to magnifiers, voice input tools, and mobile recognition applications, each tailored to the user's specific vision status, job requirements, and digital environment.

Fostering an Accessibility Culture

While legal compliance forms the baseline, the most progressive organizations go beyond mere adherence to regulations. They foster a culture of accessibility by including accessibility criteria in IT procurement checklists, consulting end-users – such as visually impaired employees – when evaluating software updates, normalizing the request for assistive technologies without stigma, and designing digital workflows that are screen-reader friendly by default. These efforts align with the principles of universal design and enhance accessibility not only for employees with disabilities but for all workers.

Employer Advantages and External Support

Employers also benefit significantly from investing in assistive technologies and robust internal policies. Inclusive workplaces often experience higher employee



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retention, improved morale, and increased innovation. Furthermore, many EU countries offer public funding mechanisms that provide financial support for purchasing assistive devices, adapting digital systems, training visually impaired employees and their teams, and subsidizing the employment of persons with disabilities.

In conclusion, assistive technology policies are vital for enabling meaningful workplace inclusion of visually impaired individuals. When thoughtfully implemented, these policies support the rights and productivity of employees with disabilities while enriching the organizational culture and operational effectiveness as a whole.

How to Request Workplace Accommodations for Persons with Disabilities – Examples from Croatia and the EU

Reasonable accommodations are modifications or adjustments made in the workplace to enable persons with disabilities to perform their job duties on an equal basis with others. According to EU Directive 2000/78/EC and Croatia's Anti-Discrimination Act, these accommodations are necessary to ensure equal participation but must not impose an undue or disproportionate burden on the employer. This legal framework balances the rights of employees with disabilities and the practical capabilities of employers, promoting fairness and inclusion in employment.

When and How to Request Accommodations

Accommodations can be requested at different points in the employment process. They may be sought during hiring, either when applying for a job or at the interview stage. Alternatively, employees can request accommodations after they have started working, especially if their condition changes or if existing arrangements are no longer sufficient. Although verbal requests are valid, it is advisable to submit accommodation requests in writing to ensure proper documentation and clarity. A well-prepared request typically includes personal information, a general description of the disability (without disclosing sensitive medical details unless necessary), an explanation of the accommodation needed, and how it would improve the employee's ability to perform their work. Supporting documentation, such as medical certificates, disability assessments, or expert opinions from recognized institutions like the Croatian Pension Insurance Institute or the Institute for Evaluation, Professional Rehabilitation, and Employment of Persons with Disabilities (ZOSI), often accompanies the request.



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Support and Examples from Croatia

In Croatia, the Croatian Employment Service (HZZ) and ZOSI play a crucial role in supporting workplace accommodations. These organizations provide financial assistance for physical modifications such as ergonomic furniture or assistive technologies. They also facilitate the provision of personal assistants to support employees with disabilities in their daily tasks and offer counseling and guidance to employers and employees to ensure proper implementation of accommodations. For example, an employee using a wheelchair might request physical adaptations like ramps or modified restroom facilities, which employers can fund with support from ZOSI. Similarly, a visually impaired worker might arrange to work remotely and use digital documents compatible with screen readers, with expert guidance available to assist the employer in making these adjustments.

Examples from Across the European Union

Across the European Union, member states have developed various mechanisms to support workplace accommodations. In Belgium, the Flemish Employment and Vocational Training Service (VDAB) offers subsidies for technological aids that workers with disabilities can apply for by submitting the necessary forms and disability documentation. Germany's Integration Office (Integrationsamt) provides financial support for technical adaptations, personal assistance, and employer training. For instance, a hearing-impaired employee may request visual alerts instead of sound alarms, which the employer implements with help from Integrationsamt. In Sweden, the Employment Agency can cover the full cost of workplace adaptations, including training colleagues on how to work effectively with employees with disabilities.

Rights, Protections, and Practical Advice

In terms of rights and protections, Croatian law considers an unjustified refusal to provide reasonable accommodations as a form of discrimination. Employees who encounter such barriers have several avenues for recourse, including filing complaints with the Office of the Ombudsperson for Persons with Disabilities or pursuing claims through the Commission for the Protection of Dignity or the courts. Support from trade unions or civil society organizations can also be instrumental in navigating these processes.

Employees seeking accommodations are encouraged to be specific and pragmatic when describing their needs and proposing solutions. Reaching out to relevant institutions such as ZOSI, the Croatian Employment Service, or disability associations can help ensure the accommodation process is smooth and effective. It



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is important to recognize that accessible workplaces are not a privilege but a legal right, essential for enabling equal opportunities and inclusion in the workforce.

Chapter 7: Advanced Tools & Innovation

Technology is evolving rapidly, and so are the tools available to visually impaired professionals. While foundational digital skills and mainstream software allow VIPs to meet basic job requirements, advanced tools and innovative solutions offer new opportunities for productivity, independence, and inclusion.

This chapter explores a range of technologies that go beyond the essentials – tools that improve mobility, enhance access to printed or visual content, optimize workplace efficiency, or offer new ways to interface with digital environments. These solutions are increasingly relevant as workplaces adopt hybrid structures, rely on cloud ecosystems, and explore AI-assisted tools.

Importantly, innovation in accessibility is not just about using specialized “blind tech.” Many general-use technologies can be adapted or customized to meet accessibility needs. Knowing how to configure, combine, or evaluate these tools empowers VIPs to shape their own work environments.

Mobile Assistive Apps and Object Recognition

Mobile devices are powerful tools for visually impaired professionals, offering access to a wide array of assistive applications designed for on-the-go independence. These apps leverage smartphone cameras, artificial intelligence, and cloud processing to recognize text, objects, and surroundings.

Seeing AI, developed by Microsoft, is one of the most popular and versatile mobile apps for VIPs. It can read printed text, identify currency, describe scenes, recognize faces, and even read barcodes to provide product information. The app is free and available on iOS. For example, in a workplace scenario, a user might scan a printed invoice, use the Short Text mode to identify numbers or names on a label, or read the subject line of a physical letter before opening it.

Envision AI is another powerful app that uses a smartphone camera to describe environments, read signs, or recognize people. Unlike Seeing AI, Envision is available for both iOS and Android and offers integration with smart glasses for hands-free use. VIPs in customer-facing or mobility-intensive roles may benefit from



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this wearable version, particularly when constant interaction with objects, clients, or printed documents is involved.

Apps such as **Be My Eyes** use a different model. Rather than relying solely on AI, they connect VIPs with sighted volunteers or company support agents via live video. This service can be particularly helpful in resolving unexpected issues, such as checking the expiration date on a product or reading complex handwritten notes. While not ideal for sensitive information, it offers an important layer of flexibility and social support.

These tools significantly extend the autonomy of VIPs in navigating unfamiliar environments, reading inaccessible materials, or managing quick tasks without additional help.

Screen Customization, Advanced Accessibility Features, and Operating System Enhancements

While screen readers and magnifiers are commonly known, many operating systems include advanced features that allow users to deeply personalize their digital experience. These are especially valuable in multitasking, fatigue management, and working with complex content.

On **Windows**, the built-in **Narrator** has evolved into a viable backup screen reader with simplified settings and clear onboarding instructions. High-contrast themes, cursor customization, focus assist (to minimize distractions), and voice access features (allowing full voice control of the device) are available natively and increasingly relevant in hybrid workplaces.

macOS and iOS include VoiceOver rotor controls, custom gestures, and the ability to assign VoiceOver actions to back taps on the phone. Features such as Spoken Content, which reads selected text aloud, and Live Speech, which allows pre-typed phrases to be spoken during calls, are especially useful in communication-heavy roles.

Smartphone operating systems also include features for **customizing interaction methods**, such as replacing physical typing with voice input or haptic feedback. VIPs working with repetitive tasks can benefit from automation tools such as iOS Shortcuts or Android's Action Blocks, which allow common sequences (e.g., composing a message, opening a Zoom meeting) to be performed with a single tap or voice command.



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Workplace training should include time for exploring and configuring these system-level tools to match individual working styles. Personalization contributes not only to efficiency but also to comfort, reducing fatigue and helping VIPs maintain focus throughout long workdays.

AI-Based Productivity Tools

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly embedded in mainstream office tools. For VIPs, this represents an opportunity to overcome common barriers – such as information overload, formatting complexity, or real-time editing – in new ways.

In **Microsoft 365**, features like **Editor** and **Dictate** help users write and review content efficiently. Microsoft Editor can suggest grammar corrections, rephrasing options, and clarity improvements. Paired with screen readers, it supports clean writing without visual proofreading. Dictation allows voice input directly into Word, Outlook, or Teams, helping users capture ideas quickly.

Google Workspace also offers AI-based suggestions. Smart Compose in Gmail and Docs predicts common phrases, while voice typing in Google Docs continues to improve in accuracy and speed. These tools are especially useful in writing-heavy roles or when switching between tasks quickly.

Beyond built-in tools, VIPs can experiment with custom AI assistants, such as those developed using GPT-based platforms. These tools can summarize meeting transcripts, generate draft responses to emails, or describe content within documents. For example, if a visually impaired employee receives a 10-page report, an AI tool could summarize it in two paragraphs, offering faster comprehension and better decision-making support.

Training in these tools should be task-specific. Rather than introducing AI broadly, it's more effective to show how it can be used to complete an actual job responsibility faster or with less strain – such as generating a meeting summary, organizing ideas for a presentation, or checking a document for errors.

Wearables and Emerging Tech: Smart Glasses, Braille Displays, and Haptic Devices

Emerging hardware technologies are opening new avenues for access and inclusion. While still evolving, these tools are worth exploring for VIPs who need high levels of mobility or tactile interaction.



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Braille displays are already common among users who prefer tactile reading or work in environments where audio output is not feasible. Newer models are wireless, lightweight, and can connect to multiple devices at once. For professional settings that involve coding, reviewing data, or proofreading sensitive documents, braille displays offer unmatched precision.

Smart glasses, such as Envision Glasses or the OrCam MyEye, use a combination of cameras, microphones, and speakers to deliver visual information as spoken output. Some models can recognize faces, read signs, or detect colors, making them ideal for VIPs in visually dynamic roles such as customer service, field inspection, or public engagement.

Haptic feedback devices, though less common, are gaining traction in accessibility innovation. These include wearables that vibrate to indicate directions (e.g., left or right turns when navigating), alert the user to messages without audio, or simulate tactile shapes and diagrams for technical users.

It is important to note that many of these tools require training, financial investment, and testing for suitability in real-world work environments. Employers, VET trainers, and support organizations can play a critical role in introducing these technologies and supporting trials or pilot programs.

Keeping Up with Innovation and Advocating for Access

The rapid pace of change in digital tools presents both opportunities and challenges. VIPs and their trainers must remain active learners, regularly exploring new software updates, accessibility standards, and assistive tech offerings.

Resources such as WebAIM, AppleVis, Freedom Scientific webinars, and dedicated accessibility forums provide ongoing updates. Platforms like YouTube also host user-led tutorials and walkthroughs for new tools. Participation in these communities helps VIPs stay ahead of developments and discover peer-reviewed solutions to shared challenges.

It's equally important for VIPs to become advocates – not just users. Providing feedback to software developers, testing beta features, or contributing to accessibility reviews empowers VIPs to influence the direction of innovation. Workplace inclusion improves most quickly when users are seen as experts, not passive recipients of support.



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Chapter 8: Curated List of Accessible Tools for Employment and Digital Productivity

This chapter provides a curated selection of digital tools that are widely used by visually impaired persons (VIPs) to support workplace tasks, digital communication, independent access to information, and overall productivity. All tools listed have been selected based on their accessibility, practicality, and relevance to common employment needs. The goal is not to list every tool available, but to offer a reliable starting point for VIPs, trainers, and employers seeking proven solutions.

1. Screen Readers

NVDA (NonVisual Desktop Access)

- **Platform:** Windows
- **Cost:** Free
- **Use:** Reads on-screen content using synthetic speech. Supports major applications like Word, Excel, and web browsers.
- **Notes:** Open-source; lightweight and highly customizable.

JAWS (Job Access With Speech)

- **Platform:** Windows
- **Cost:** Paid (discounted for education/employment programs)
- **Use:** Advanced screen reader with strong support for enterprise environments, Excel, complex tables, and scripting.
- **Notes:** Often used in professional settings with complex software needs.

VoiceOver

- **Platform:** macOS, iOS
- **Cost:** Built-in
- **Use:** Gesture-based navigation on iPhone/iPad and full keyboard support on Mac. Excellent integration across Apple's ecosystem.
- **Notes:** Ideal for users in Apple environments.

TalkBack

- **Platform:** Android
- **Cost:** Built-in



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- **Use:** Allows full navigation and interaction with Android devices using gestures and spoken feedback.
- **Notes:** Compatible with many Android-based accessibility apps.

2. Screen Magnifiers and Visual Adjustment Tools

ZoomText

- **Platform:** Windows
- **Cost:** Paid
- **Use:** Combines magnification with speech for users with low vision. Offers high levels of customization.
- **Notes:** Useful in office roles requiring detailed visual work.

Windows Magnifier

- **Platform:** Windows
- **Cost:** Built-in
- **Use:** Basic full-screen and lens magnification. Supports color inversion and smoothing for clarity.
- **Notes:** Activates with Windows + Plus key.

macOS Zoom

- **Platform:** macOS
- **Cost:** Built-in
- **Use:** Smooth scaling and multiple control options. Works well with dual-monitor setups.
- **Notes:** Customizable in System Preferences > Accessibility.

Browser Zoom Functions

- **Platform:** Chrome, Firefox, Edge, Safari
- **Cost:** Built-in
- **Use:** Zooms in/out on webpages. Often supports up to 500% magnification.
- **Notes:** Useful for quick adjustments when reading online.

3. Voice-to-Text / Dictation Tools

Windows Dictation



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- **Platform:** Windows
- **Cost:** Built-in
- **Use:** Real-time speech-to-text in any text field (e.g., Word, email).
- **Notes:** Activated with Windows + H.

Google Docs Voice Typing

- **Platform:** Google Docs (Chrome)
- **Cost:** Free
- **Use:** Allows continuous voice input in documents. Supports multiple languages.
- **Notes:** Found under Tools > Voice Typing in Google Docs.

macOS/iOS Dictation

- **Platform:** Apple devices
- **Cost:** Built-in
- **Use:** Speech-to-text in all editable fields. Supports punctuation commands.
- **Notes:** Can be toggled with double-tap or voice command.

4. Accessible Collaboration and Productivity Tools

Microsoft Word (with Accessibility Checker)

- **Platform:** Windows, macOS, Online
- **Use:** Word processing with built-in features for document navigation, styles, and accessibility verification.
- **Notes:** Integrates well with screen readers and braille displays.

Google Docs (with Screen Reader Support)

- **Platform:** Online (Chrome preferred)
- **Use:** Collaborative document editing in real time. Screen reader mode enables spoken feedback.
- **Notes:** Turn on Screen Reader Support under Tools > Accessibility Settings.



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Microsoft Teams

- **Platform:** Desktop, Web, Mobile
- **Use:** Real-time chat, video calls, and document sharing with full keyboard navigation and screen reader access.
- **Notes:** Works well in corporate and education settings.

Zoom

- **Platform:** Desktop, Web, Mobile
- **Use:** Video conferencing with keyboard shortcuts, screen reader announcements, and chat integration.
- **Notes:** Preferred for meetings with multiple speakers.

5. Mobile and Object Recognition Apps

Seeing AI

- **Platform:** iOS
- **Cost:** Free
- **Use:** Reads text, identifies products, faces, and scenes using the phone camera.
- **Notes:** Excellent for quick scanning tasks in the workplace.

Envision AI

- **Platform:** iOS, Android
- **Cost:** Subscription-based (free trial available)
- **Use:** Advanced object and scene recognition, document reading, and smart glasses integration.
- **Notes:** Suitable for mobile professionals or complex environments.

Be My Eyes

- **Platform:** iOS, Android
- **Cost:** Free
- **Use:** Connects VIPs to volunteers or support staff for visual assistance via live video.
- **Notes:** Best used for non-confidential, quick identification needs.



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6. Cloud Storage and File Management

Google Drive

- **Platform:** Web, Mobile
- **Use:** Cloud file storage and sharing with keyboard and screen reader compatibility.
- **Notes:** Folder organization and sharing permissions are accessible.

OneDrive

- **Platform:** Windows, Web, Mobile
- **Use:** Integrated with Microsoft Office for automatic syncing and collaboration.
- **Notes:** Includes file recovery and version history.

Dropbox

- **Platform:** Web, Desktop, Mobile
- **Use:** Accessible file sharing platform with simple interface.
- **Notes:** Screen reader navigation supported on web and mobile.

7. Braille and Tactile Devices

Focus Blue Braille Displays

- **Platform:** Compatible with Windows, macOS, iOS
- **Use:** Allows reading and navigation via braille. Integrates with JAWS and other screen readers.
- **Notes:** Common in formal or academic settings.

Orbit Reader Series

- **Platform:** Multiplatform
- **Use:** Affordable, portable braille displays for reading and note-taking.
- **Notes:** Widely used for training and early career use.



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Chapter 9: Additional Resources & Support Networks

For visually impaired persons (VIPs) and the professionals supporting them, access to high-quality training and digital tools must be complemented by strong networks – local, national, and European. This chapter outlines reliable contact points, peer communities, and institutional resources that provide essential support, guidance, and lifelong learning opportunities for VIPs across Europe.

Each entry has been verified and drawn from established platforms, EU agencies, or recognized civil society networks. This ensures all information presented here is accurate, actionable, and relevant to the goals of vocational empowerment and inclusion.

1. National Contact Points and Support Services

Each EU member state has designated public or non-governmental bodies that support the inclusion of people with disabilities, including VIPs. These bodies may provide training, legal guidance, assistive technology support, or referrals to rehabilitation services.

Key Networks and Examples:

- **Croatia – Hrvatski savez slijepih (Croatian Blind Union, CBU):** A national NGO advocating for the inclusion of blind persons since 1946. Offers assistive tech training, braille publishing, employment support, and legal assistance.
Website: www.savez-slijepih.hr.
- **Greece – KEAT (Center for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind):** Provides education, training, orientation & mobility services, and job preparedness.
Website: www.keat.gr
- **France – Fédération des Aveugles de France:** Offers services related to vocational training, advocacy, accessibility technology, and policy consultation.
Website: www.aveuglesdefrance.org
- **Germany – DBSV (German Federation of the Blind and Partially Sighted):** A leading advocacy and support group, providing a range of services and managing regional support centers.
Website: www.dbsv.org

For country-specific support organizations, the **Erasmus+ National Agencies directory** provides direct links to institutions involved in disability inclusion and VET



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delivery:

 <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/national-agencies>

2. Online Communities and Peer Mentoring Groups

Participating in digital peer networks enables VIPs to exchange knowledge, build confidence, and stay updated with assistive technologies or employment opportunities. These communities also offer emotional support and real-world advice that is difficult to access through formal channels.

Trusted Platforms:

- **AppleVis:** A community-led platform focused on Apple accessibility. Includes app reviews, tutorials, and forums for VoiceOver users (www.applevis.com)
- **RNIB Connect (UK-wide, EU-accessible):** A social platform hosted by the Royal National Institute of Blind People offering blogs, discussions, and support threads on employment, education, and daily life (www.rnib.org.uk/connect)
- **European Blind Union (EBU) – Youth and Women Networks:** EBU runs thematic groups that offer mentoring, webinars, and advocacy platforms for young blind people and women (www.euroblind.org)
- **Be My Eyes – Community Hub:** Beyond the visual assistance app, Be My Eyes hosts an international user forum and resource library for blind professionals and learners (www.bemyeyes.com)

3. Training Centres and Accessible Education Hubs

Across Europe, several institutions specialize in providing accessible vocational education for VIPs, often in partnership with national governments or EU initiatives.

Select Examples:

- **ONCE Foundation for Cooperation and Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities (Spain):** Offers VET programs tailored for blind and partially sighted individuals, including digital literacy and entrepreneurship training (www.fundaciononce.es)
- **Rehabilitation Centre for the Blind (Finland – Näkövammaisten liitto):** Delivers job coaching, IT certification training, and mobility education (www.nkl.fi)



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- **VERDE – Greece:** Research and innovation center involved in EU VET projects focused on rural inclusion, digital skills, and support for disadvantaged groups including VIPs (www.verde.org.gr)
- **MindSpin – Cyprus:** A VET-certified center promoting accessible STEM training and digital upskilling for persons with disabilities (www.mind-spin.com)

Many of these centers also act as intermediaries in Erasmus+ mobility and KA2 projects, facilitating exchange and cross-border learning for VIPs and trainers alike.

4. EU-Level Resources and Institutions

A wide array of accessible content, policy guidance, project outcomes, and community tools are hosted on official EU platforms. These resources are crucial for staying informed about inclusive VET trends, funding opportunities, and digital innovation.

European-Level Platforms:

- **EPALE (Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe):** Offers a rich library of case studies, digital inclusion practices, project databases, and networking tools for adult educators and VET providers. Search using terms like “visual impairment,” “inclusive education,” or “assistive tech.” (epale.ec.europa.eu)
- **CEDEFOP (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training):** Tracks labor trends, publishes accessible research on VET and skills strategy, and maintains databases on good practice (www.cedefop.europa.eu)
- **Erasmus+ Project Results Platform:** Searchable archive of funded projects, outputs, and resources including toolkits, training guides, and accessibility strategies for VIPs (ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects)
- **EU Disability Platform (hosted by the European Commission):** A forum for dialogue among national authorities, NGOs, and disabled persons’ organizations on implementation of the EU Disability Strategy (<https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/expert-group/s/consult?lang=en&groupID=3820>)

Reliable networks and credible information sources are essential to ensuring that visually impaired persons are not isolated in their educational or employment journey. This chapter serves as a launch point – not only for finding support – but for building meaningful partnerships, joining policy conversations, and leveraging existing European infrastructure to push accessibility forward.