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ESWOCHY

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF PEOPLE WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN SLOVAKIA

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DECLARATION

This is to declare that the thesis entitled “Employment opportunities and challenges of people with visual impairment in Slovakia”, submitted to European Joint Master in Social Work with Children and Youth is a record of original work carried out by me and has never been submitted to anywhere else.



Yetnayet Woldu Kinfe

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ABSTRACT

Title: Employment opportunities and challenges of people with visual impairment in Slovakia

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People with disabilities face disproportionate challenges in the labor market, including higher rates of unemployment and underemployment, and overrepresentation in low-skilled, low-paid positions. This study explored the employment opportunities and challenges experienced by people with visual impairments in Slovakia, drawing on the Social Model of Disability and Intersectionality Theory as guiding frameworks.

A qualitative research approach was adopted, utilizing semi-structured interviews with 7 employed people with visual impairments and 3 institutional stakeholders from the Office of Labor, Social Affairs and Family, and Blind and Partially sighted Unions. The study addressed 4 core objectives: to examine perceptions of employment opportunities; to explore support systems, including school-to-work transitions, vocational education and training, and reasonable accommodations; to evaluate the perceived strengths and weaknesses of existing employment measures; and to assess how employment challenges vary by age and gender.

Findings revealed that, while employment opportunities exist, access is often informal and hindered by inaccessible recruitment platforms, persistent employer misconceptions, and inadequate reasonable accommodations. The school-to-work transition emerged as a major gap, marked by a lack of internships, career guidance, and structured support. Vocational education and training programs were frequently outdated or misaligned with current labor market needs, and sheltered workshops, though secure, offered limited pathways for open labour market. Moreover, gender and age were shown to compound employment inequalities.

The study concludes that inclusive employment requires coordinated systemic reform involving policy enforcement, updated training systems, accessible recruitment practices, and targeted support for diverse subgroups within people with visual impairment population. These findings contribute to the broader understanding of disability-inclusive labor markets and inform actionable strategies for promoting equitable workforce participation.

Keywords: Visual impairment, Support system, Inclusive labor market, Employment measures, Employment opportunities, Employment challenges

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

COVID	Corona Virus Disease
EU	European Union
ICF	International Classification of Functioning
NGO	Non-Government Organization
ILO	International Labour Organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
UN	United Nation
UNCRPD	United Nation Convention on the Rights of People with Disability
WHO	World Health Organization

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1. 1. Background of the Study

Globally, approximately 1.3 billion people about 16% of the world's population live with a disability, and 80% of this group are of working age (ILO, 2023). Due to factors such as population growth, aging, the rise of chronic diseases, and medical advances that prolong life, the number of people with disabilities is steadily increasing (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2020). The World Health Organization's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) emphasizes that disability is not merely a medical condition but results from the complex interaction between health conditions, personal factors, and environmental barriers (Schwab et al., 2022). Likewise, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) defines disability as long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which, in interaction with different barriers, may impede full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (Rohith & Goku, 2024).

The opportunity to access education and meaningful employment is vital for ensuring equality between persons with and without disabilities (Sellevoll, 2016). Employment plays a central role in maintaining a decent standard of living and enabling social inclusion (van der Zwan & de Beer, 2021). However, people with disabilities continue to face disproportionate challenges in the labor market, including higher rates of unemployment and underemployment. When employed, they are often concentrated in low-skilled, low-paid, and informal jobs with limited opportunities for advancement or career development (ILO, 2014; WHO, 2022). Unemployment rates have been far higher than those for persons without disabilities; employment rates for individuals with blindness or low vision that is, those with visual impairments have historically been substantially lower (Mcdonnall & Mcknight, 2021).

Globally, seven in ten persons with disabilities are inactive in the labor market, meaning they are neither employed nor seeking employment. Both men and women with disabilities experience higher inactivity rates than those without disabilities, with women facing additional barriers due to gender stereotypes and compounded disadvantages (Carrasco, 2024). Consequently, women with disabilities often experience even higher levels of economic marginalization (Rahman &

Parvez, 2024). In addition to labor market exclusion, negative perceptions about the capabilities of people with disabilities and limited access to quality education and vocational training further exacerbate employment challenges. Research has shown that individuals with disabilities are frequently funneled into entry-level positions that do not reflect their skill levels, and they face significant barriers to promotion and leadership roles (Naami, 2015).

Despite these challenges, ongoing efforts seek to reduce the barriers faced by persons with disabilities. Legislation such as the Persons with Disabilities Act (Act 715) and international frameworks like the UNCRPD emphasize inclusive employment policies and supportive measures to protect the right of people with disabilities to gain and retain employment (Othman & Sorial, 2017). However, low awareness among employers and the general public about the potential and contributions of persons with disabilities remains a significant obstacle (Tessier et al., 2024). Based on Eurostat's estimate, compared to 18.0% of persons without disabilities, 28.8% of persons with disabilities in the European Union were at danger of poverty or social exclusion in 2023 (Eurostat, 2024).

Adding to the existing body of research, this study explores the employment opportunities and challenges faced by people with visual impairment in Slovakia. By identifying these barriers and potential solutions, this research aims to support the development of inclusive policies and practices that promote a more equitable labor market for people with visual impairment.

1.2. Statement of Problem

Employment in the labor market is a crucial indicator of social participation and inclusion for people with disabilities (Sellevoll, 2016). However, globally, fewer than 20% of people with disabilities are employed and across OECD countries (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), the employment rate of people with disabilities is, on average, 27 percentage points lower than that of those without disabilities (OECD, 2022). These disparities are largely driven by widespread barriers, including societal stigma, discrimination, inaccessible work environments, and limited access to education and vocational training (Buchanan & Hammersley, 2023; Handicap International, 2016).

Despite global efforts to improve employment inclusion, people with visual impairments continue to face disproportionately high unemployment levels, indicating a persistent disparity in labor market participation (Mcdonnall & Mcknight, 2021). Though the employment of persons with

disabilities has been the subject of increasing scholarly attention, most studies focus on broad disability categories or general policy analysis, rather than on specific impairments or lived experiences within particular national contexts. For instance, Licite-Kurbe and Sevcuna (2023) examined factors influencing disability employment in Latvia but did not disaggregate by type of disability or explore individual narratives. Miller and Kass (2023) addressed internal and external barriers to labor market integration but lacked empirical evidence from distinct countries. In Spain, Cámara et al. (2020) explored the economic and social consequences of excluding people with disabilities from the workforce, emphasizing its high societal cost. Moreover, Jenei and Szalai (2024) investigated disability employment policies in Hungary and Slovakia, revealing Slovakia's preference for sheltered employment over integration into the open labor market. However, their study grouped all disabilities together and did not offer detailed insight into the experiences of specific groups such as people with visual impairment. Kubeková (2024) examined inclusive employment strategies in Slovakia with a focus on digital skills and assistive technologies but again did not target people with visual impairments.

These studies, while informative, reveal a significant gap: a lack of focused research exploring the employment experiences, challenges, and opportunities of people with visual impairments in Slovakia. Therefore, to the best knowledge of the researcher there is limited research in Slovakia on employment opportunities and challenges of people with visual impairment, this study aims to fill the gap by specifically focusing on people with visual impairment.

1.3. Research Objectives

1.3.1. General Objective

The study aims to explore the employment opportunities and challenges of people with visual impairment in Slovakia.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Examine how people with visual impairment perceive their employment opportunities in open labour market
2. Explore the support systems available in employment of people with visual impairment in Slovakia.

2.1. To examine the role of support systems in the school-to-work transition for people with Visual impairment.

2.2. To assess the effectiveness of vocational education and training programs in preparing people with visual impairment for employment.

2.3. To explore the role of reasonable accommodations and career development programs for employees with disabilities.

3. Evaluate the perceived strengths and weaknesses of existing employment measures for people with visual impairment.
4. Explore the challenges faced by people with visual impairment in securing employment

4.1. Explore how these challenges vary across different demographics (age, gender).

1.4. Research Questions

1. How do people with visual impairments perceive their employment opportunities in the open labour market in Slovakia?
2. What support systems are available to assist people with visual impairments in securing and maintaining employment in Slovakia?

2.1. What role do support systems play in the school-to-work transition for people with visual impairments?

2.2. How do people with visual impairments perceive the effectiveness of vocational education and training programs in preparing them for employment?

2.3. How do reasonable accommodations and career development programs influence the employment experiences of people with visual impairments?

3. How do people with visual impairments perceive the strengths and weaknesses of existing employment measures in Slovakia?
4. What challenges do people with visual impairments face in securing employment in Slovakia?

4.1. Do these challenges differ across demographic factors such as age and gender?

1.5. Relevance of the Study

This study is significant both in its academic contribution and its potential to inform practice and policy. Despite the growing recognition of disability rights and inclusion across Europe, people with visual impairments in Slovakia continue to face disproportionate barriers in accessing employment opportunities (Ogedengbe et al., 2024). By focusing specifically on this population,

the study addresses a critical gap in the existing literature, which often generalizes across disability groups without capturing the unique experiences of those with visual impairments.

The finding of the study can contribute valuable insights to researchers, practitioners, and policymakers working in the fields of disability inclusion, employment, and social policy. In particular, it highlights the perspectives of people with visual impairments themselves an essential but often underrepresented voice in academic and policy discourse. Understanding how people with visual impairments perceive their employment opportunities and challenges offers a more grounded and human-centered view of the issue.

Moreover, the study evaluates support systems, vocational training, workplace accommodations, and employment measures from the standpoint of employed people with visual impairment. This perspective is crucial for assessing the effectiveness of existing interventions and identifying areas for improvement. The results can inform the design of more responsive and inclusive employment strategies in Slovakia and serve as a reference for similar contexts in other countries.

Finally, the study also holds relevance for advocacy organizations, educators, and employers seeking to better support people with visual impairments through improved school-to-work transitions, inclusive hiring practices, and long-term career development. By identifying both systemic challenges and enabling factors, the study supports broader efforts to create an equitable and accessible labor market for all.

1.6. Operational Definitions of Terms

***Open labour market*:** refers to work in a mainstream or regular employment setting, as opposed to a setting that has been designed specifically to hire a certain group of workers, such as persons with disabilities (Engelbrecht & Lorenzo, 2010).

In this research, the term refers specifically to jobs available to the general public in Slovakia, not limited to protected or subsidized positions for people with visual impairment.

Vocational education and training: means an educational process in which knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for the performance of a profession, group of professions or for the performance of professional activities are acquired; it is divided into theoretical teaching and practical teaching, (The Slovak Republic Ministry of Justice: On Vocational Education and Traning and on Amendements on Certain Acts, 2015).

For this research vocational education training refers to any skill and practical pre-service training that prepares people with visual impairment to the open labour market.

Visual impairment: refers to a condition where an individual experiences significant limitations or impairments in vision that cannot be fully corrected with standard eyeglasses, contact lenses, or medical treatment. This encompasses a range of visual impairments, from partial to total blindness, affecting the ability to perceive and interpret visual information (Pathak & Vitthalrao, 2024).

For this research visual impairment refers to people with partial sighted and blind.

Support system: Support system is any kind of formal or informal networks and resources that facilitate, encourage and enhance the knowledge and skill of a person. Support system in the employment of people with disability can be delivered in different ways (Filgueiras et al., 2015). But for this research it includes; school to work transition, vocational education and training, reasonable accommodation and career development for people with visual impairment.

Employment measures: are the active labour measures that facilitate and enhance the employment of people with disabilities (Ecobici & Paliu, 2008).

But this research focuses on quota system and sheltered workshop employment measures in Slovakia.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Overview of Disability

Disability is a complex and multidimensional concept, encompassing various definitions, models, and interpretations. The World Health Organization (WHO) notes that defining disability is challenging due to its dynamic and contested nature (Gutterman, 2023). There is no universally accepted definition of disability, and its interpretation varies across disciplines and legal frameworks. As a result, disability arises from the combination of personal and environmental variables, such as negative attitudes, insufficient social support, and inaccessible transportation, with people who have health disorders like depression, Down syndrome, and cerebral palsy (WHO, 2025). The definition proposed by the United Nations (UN) in 2006 has been widely used ever since, despite the fact that there is no universally accepted definition of disability at the national or EU (European Union) levels. The EU formally adopted the UN's definition, which is founded on human rights and the non-discrimination principle, by ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at the end of 2010 (European Union, 2017).

The group of people with disabilities is not uniform. Like everyone else, people with disabilities have a variety of factors that determine their identities, needs, and personal circumstances. There is significant diversity in the types of disabilities. Sensory disabilities, like hearing and vision impairments; physical disabilities, like mobility and orthopedic impairments; intellectual disabilities, like learning, understanding, and concentration impairments; and psychosocial disabilities, like impairments caused by mood disorders, maladaptive behaviors, and mental illnesses, are the main categories (Papakonstantinou et al., 2018). Therefore, reduced visual performance that cannot be corrected by surgery, medical procedures, or refractive correction (glasses or contact lenses) is known as visual impairment (Naipal & Rampersad, 2018). According to estimates from the World Health Organization (WHO), 1.2 billion individuals worldwide suffer from an uncorrectable visual impairment, which means they are either blind or have low vision that cannot be improved by surgery or glasses (Cmar & Mcdonnall, 2024).

The global prevalence of disability is rising due to factors such as aging populations, chronic illnesses, violence, inadequate healthcare, and environmental disasters (Gutterman, 2023). According to the WHO and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, disability rates are particularly high in developing countries, where limited access to medical and social support exacerbates challenges faced by individuals with disabilities. Additionally, technological and medical advancements have enabled many individuals with disabilities to live longer, increasing the overall prevalence of disability (WHO, 2025). The medical model and the social model have been the two primary schools of thought about disability since the 1960s. Every model is predicated on a distinct theory regarding the connection between a person's health and their living environment (European Union, 2017):

- The **medical model** views disability as an individual problem resulting from a disease, injury, or health condition that limits a person's ability to function normally. Rehabilitation is often emphasized to help individuals regain functionality (Baart et al., 2023)
- The **social model** emerged from disability rights movements in the United Kingdom and North America. It argues that disability is created by societal barriers such as attitudinal, physical, and economic obstacles rather than an individual's impairments. This model calls for systemic changes to promote inclusion and accessibility (Baart et al., 2023).

Accordingly, EU definitions of disability differ significantly across member states due to their unique historical, cultural, and social contexts. Some countries adopt a medical perspective, while others employ a social model or a combination of both. For instance, Germany defines disability based on deviations in bodily functions, mental abilities, or health conditions that persist for more than six months and impair societal participation. Spain, also, defines disability through its Social Integration of Disabled Persons Law (European Union, 2017). Slovakia on the other hand, applies a dual approach, incorporating both medical and social factors in its definition. According to Act No. 447/2008 Coll., a person is considered to have a severe disability if they experience at least a 50% impairment of functional capacity, expected to last for more than 12 months. The assessment process involves both medical evaluations and social factors, such as an individual's capacity to navigate daily life, their family background, and access to essential services (Tomáš et al., 2020).

2.2. Role of Education and Training for Employment

It is often accepted that education has a significant impact on one's opportunities in life, including those related to employment, income, and poverty risk (Watson et al., 2015). However, studies reveal that people with disability face significant challenges when trying to participate in the educational process (Douglas et al., 2012). One area where students with vision impairments have challenges that could affect their education is in social relationships. For instance, it is believed that one of the main obstacles to social engagement between students with vision impairment and their peers who are totally sighted is the inability to recognize faces (Opie & Southcott, 2016). Thus, they are also more likely to dislike school. They also have a higher probability of having fewer friends and unfavorable peer relationships. These students have a higher chance of experiencing worse academic results. When they graduate from school, persons with disabilities have less educational background than individuals without disabilities (Watson et al., 2015). Because of this, studies constantly indicate that, in comparison to their peers without disabilities, people with disability experience lower results after school, including independent living, employment, and attendance at postsecondary educational institutions (Bouck, 2012).

The correlation between education and employment opportunities is undeniable. As evidenced by some authors, higher levels of education significantly boost the employment prospects of people with disabilities. This positive association underscores the critical role of education in mitigating the employment gap between people with and without disabilities (Bouck, 2012; Douglas et al., 2012; Eisenman, 2003; Watson et al., 2015). Albinowski et al. (2023) further elaborate on this by illustrating how the disability education gap directly impacts employment outcomes, emphasizing the necessity of narrowing educational disparities to foster better employment outcomes.

Several studies have demonstrated that a greater level of education increases one's chances of finding job (Bouck, 2012; Douglas et al., 2012; Eisenman, 2003; Watson et al., 2015). For instance, Albinowski et al. (2023) highlighted the significant impact of the disability education gap on employment outcomes across Europe. Their study highlights how disparities in educational opportunities between individuals with and without disabilities lead to lower employment rates among those with disabilities. This finding emphasizes the need for policies and interventions aimed at reducing these educational gaps to improve employment outcomes. Alca (2019) further elaborates on the critical education's role in preparing people with disabilities for the labor market.

By examining the intersection of education and social protection for adults with disabilities, Alca argues that education not only equips individuals with the skills needed for employment but also provides them with a sense of self-worth and dignity, thereby increasing their chances of securing employment.

Opie and Southcott (2016) suggested that for people with visually impairment to reach their maximum potential, a welcoming and encouraging school climate where they can engage in constructive peer relationships, grow participating in all kinds of school activities and forming deep connections are crucial. The Division for Inclusive Social Development (2014) advocates for the right of persons with disabilities to work, emphasizing the importance of inclusive education systems that prepare students with disabilities for the workforce. This perspective aligns with the broader call for policy changes that ensure equal access to quality education for all, including those with disabilities. Furthermore, Douglas et al. (2012) discusses measuring educational engagement, progress, and outcomes for children with special educational needs. Their work emphasizes the importance of tracking educational milestones and achievements to identify areas where intervention may be beneficial, ultimately improving the transition to employment.

Despite the universal human right to education, people with disabilities often face exclusionary practices within educational settings, leading to lower educational attainment and subsequent disadvantages in the labor market. Non-inclusive school environments and access barriers contribute to the underrepresentation of people with disabilities in higher education and vocational training, limiting their employability and wage potential (ILO & OECD, 2018; Oliver & Barnes, 2010). Addressing the educational and employment challenges faced by people with disabilities requires a multifaceted approach. Alca (2019) emphasizes the importance of resolving employment and social acceptance issues through elevated educational standards. This perspective aligns with the universal human right to education, as affirmed by numerous national and international conventions and laws. The Education 2030 agenda, adopted in 2015, aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all, advocating for lifelong learning opportunities. However, realizing this goal remains vague for people with disabilities due to systemic barriers and the lack of adaptation in mainstream education and vocational training to accommodate their unique needs (ILO & OECD, 2018; Papakonstantinou et al., 2018).

In Slovakia, the right of students with disabilities to vocational education and training is guaranteed by Article 42 of the Constitution and Act No. 61/2015. Students with visual impairments may access training in mainstream or specialized schools, supported by individualized educational approaches, qualified teachers, and a safe, inclusive environment tailored to their needs(European Comission, 2025). Vocational education and training play a vital role in empowering individuals with visual impairments by equipping them with practical skills for employment and daily living. It fosters independence, enhances self-reliance, and helps overcome social stigma and isolation, ultimately contributing to greater social inclusion (Jahanzaib et al., 2024). Therefore, pre-and post-vocational education and training can serve as an alternative to conventional teaching methods for students with visual impairments. This includes introducing them to various job types within their surroundings. With the support of vocational education and training, individuals with visual impairments are better equipped to identify and pursue careers that align with their interests (Abdul et al., 2023).

In conclusion, the relationship between education and employment opportunities for people with disabilities is complex and multifaceted. While the importance of education in mitigating the employment gap between people with and without disabilities is undeniable, the persistent educational disparities and systemic barriers present formidable challenges. To solve these problems and guarantee that everyone, regardless of disability, has access to high-quality education and the chance to thrive in the workforce, educators, legislators, and the general public must work together.

2.2.1. School-to-Work Transition

Transition from school to a work, from one career path to another, and occasionally from unemployment brought on by a layoff or personal problem to a job, is known as transition to work (Bender, 2020). One of the main goals of education related to the transition from school to adulthood should be to assist students with impairments in finding post-school employment. Research in this area has produced valuable insights into the factors related to adult employment for people with disabilities (Eisenman, 2003).

The Salamanca Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) states that

> It is important to support young people with special education needs as they successfully transition from school to adult employment. With training in skills that address the social

> and communication demands and expectations of adult life, schools should help people become economically active and provide them with the abilities necessary for daily living. (page 34).

The school to work transition process for people with disabilities requires a coordinated approach that addresses their individual needs, promotes self-determination, and fosters the development of employability skills (Eisenman, 2003; Wehman, 2013). For instance, Papakonstantinou et al. (2018) indicated that while there are many factors to take into account when creating a system that prepares all students for college and the workforce, special consideration must be given to students with disabilities, who may encounter additional difficulties. As they grow from infancy into adulthood, many young people with disabilities experience a challenging time of transition and uncertainty, particularly when it comes to finding fulfilling work and living independently. The transition to adult independence in the real world can be especially difficult for young people with disabilities who were barred from community engagement and contact throughout their formal years due to prejudice and hurdles based on attitudes.

A comprehensive review of the theoretical stances taken in studies on the transition of individuals with disabilities from school to the workforce, Eisenman (2003) comes to the conclusion that studying three analytical levels can lead to a deeper comprehension of these transitions. In the first, structures are examined in relation to other structures, such as educational systems (organizations) and their policies and values about school-to-work efforts. Fields inside fields, such as connections, values, and processes among actors within and across the context of school to work transitions, are examined at the second level of analysis. Because it highlights the relationship between occupational transitions and dominant social categories including socioeconomic class, gender, ethnicity, and disability all of which are associated with unfair treatment and outcomes in the educational system this intermediate level of study is important. Eisenman's third level of analysis looks at the backgrounds, experiences, and personalities of people who work in a certain profession, such education and the transition from school to the workplace, such as students, families, instructors, and supervisors. Overall, this multi-dimensional approach sheds light on the complexities of transitioning from education to employment for people with disabilities. It underlines the need for comprehensive research that considers both systemic factors and individual experiences.

Moreover, the type of disability also plays a crucial role in determining the unique hurdles encountered during the school to work transition. For example, people with visual impairments may struggle with accessing digital platforms and online job applications, while those with hearing impairments may face difficulties in communication and collaboration within the workplace (Papakonstantinou et al., 2018). Similarly, individuals with autism spectrum disorder may encounter challenges related to social interactions and adapting to new environments (Albinowski et al., 2023). Therefore Eisenman (2003) suggests integrated learning experiences that combine academic and vocational training, suggesting that such approaches can significantly improve employment readiness. Moreover, Kelly (2019) suggested that when students with visual impairment are transitioning from school to the workforce, they require information and guidance that meets their requirements.

Ultimately, the school to work transition for people with disabilities demands a holistic and empathetic approach that acknowledges and addresses their unique needs and challenges. By leveraging a comprehensive understanding of the transition process and support mechanisms accordingly, educational institutions and policymakers can play a pivotal role in facilitating a smoother path to employment for this vulnerable population.

2.3. Reasonable Accommodation

Changes or adaptations to the workplace that allow people with disabilities to carry out necessary job duties are generally referred to as reasonable accommodations (ADA National Network, 2018). In order to guarantee that people with disabilities can enjoy or exercise all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with others, the UNCRPD defines reasonable accommodation as necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments that do not impose a disproportionate or undue burden, when necessary in a particular case (Inclusive society, 2020).

Reasonable accommodation in employment is a legal obligation under EU legislation, particularly Directive 2000/78, which mandates employers to provide accommodations necessary for employees with disabilities (European Commission, 2023). Moreover, Article 38 of the Slovak Constitution (Act No. 460/1992 Coll., as modified) provides for the protection of people with disabilities in employment, vocational training, and labor relations by establishing suitable working conditions. According to Article 1 “Everyone is entitled to employment, a free choice of jobs, fair and equitable working conditions, and unemployment insurance ” (Ondrušová, 2022).

Member States often support these efforts through grants and subsidies that incentivize employers to adapt workplaces and meet legal requirements (Jacqueline et al., 2015). For instance, Ireland offers a workplace equipment adaptation grant, while Germany and Slovakia provide allowances for assistive devices and workplace modifications. Belgium, Cyprus, and the Netherlands allocate funding for sign language interpreters (Buchanan & Hammersley, 2023). While employers are legally required to provide accommodations, many rely on national or EU-level grants to fund workplace adjustments.

Studies highlight that investments in reasonable accommodation yield significant benefits, including increased productivity and reduced absenteeism (Jacqueline et al., 2015). Employers often assume that providing accommodations is costly, but many modifications require minimal or no financial investment (The Disabled people's organization Coalition, 2023). Some existing human resource policies, such as flexible work hours and telecommuting, can benefit both employees with and without disabilities (Inclusive society, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic further demonstrated the effectiveness of accommodations like telework in ensuring workforce participation (European Commission, 2023). Despite legal mandates and financial incentives, challenges persist in implementing reasonable accommodation. The open labor market provides limited support compared to sheltered employment, where employers receive allowances for establishing specialized workplaces (Kubeková, 2024). Furthermore, employers often lack guidance from labor offices on how to implement accommodations, relying instead on limited support from vocational rehabilitation institutes and private agencies (Ondrušová, 2022).

Creating an accessible environment requires eliminating various barriers, including physical, transportation, technological, and systemic challenges, that hinder the full participation of persons with disabilities. Employers play a critical role in fostering inclusion by making workplaces accessible and providing accommodations that support employees in maximizing their potential (Inclusive society, 2020). However, Recruitment remains a significant barrier, as employers are not required to justify hiring decisions, putting individuals with disabilities particularly young graduates at a disadvantage. The lack of job coaching and workplace adaptation allowances further exacerbates the problem, making it difficult for employees with disabilities to secure and retain jobs (Ondrušová, 2022).

To create truly inclusive workplaces, legal mandates must be matched by proactive employer engagement, well-funded support systems, and ongoing education to challenge biases and structural exclusion.

2.4. Employment Measures for People with Disability

EU Member States have a variety of measures intended to support the employment of persons with disabilities (Buchanan & Hammersley, 2023). For example, Slovakia has a number of employment measures that encourage the employment of people with disabilities (Kubeková, 2024). Some of the measures that Member States have put in place include wage subsidies, tax breaks for companies to encourage hiring, help with training expenses and reasonable accommodations, ongoing payment of certain disability allowance to employees with disabilities while they are at work, and the provision of individual support, including personal assistance (Buchanan & Hammersley, 2023).

The Labour Code, which establishes the duties of employers with regard to the employment of people with disabilities, including an obligation to provide adequate working conditions and possibilities to gain the necessary qualification, and contains provisions on equal treatment and non-discrimination, governs the employment of people with disabilities in Slovakia (Article 158 of the Labour Code) (Labor Code, 2001). Furthermore, Article 38 of the Slovak Constitution offers more comprehensive health protection at work, unique working circumstances, and specific protection in employment relations and training (Constitution of the Slovak Republic 460/1992 Coll., 1992).

2.4.1. The Quota System

The quota system, which is used in many European nations as well as globally, is required for both public and private businesses and organizations. By encouraging employers to hire a specific percentage of workers with disabilities, quotas aim to increase labor demand (this percentage can range from 1 to 15% of the workforce). According to Euro-found, 23 EU Member States have quota systems that encourages the employment of persons with disabilities (Buchanan & Hammersley, 2023). The premise behind the quota system is that legislative action is necessary to integrate people with disabilities into the workforce. Due to the rise in war invalids and the increasing demand for labor for Europe's reconstruction, quotas were historically established in Europe (France, Germany) in the 1950s (Dominic & Relandeau, 2017).

People with disabilities make up a minimal portion of the workforce in a quota system. The majority of EU member states with quotas have percentages ranging from 2% to 5% (Buchanan & Hammersley, 2023). Likewise, in Slovakia according to Article 63 of Act No. 5/2004 employers with more than 20 workers are required to meet the employment target of 3.2% of workers with disabilities on employment services (European Comission, 2024). Private and public entities are subject to quotas in the majority of Member States. In certain regions of Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, and Ireland, for instance, quotas are exclusive to public employers. Whereas, both public and private employers are subject to the Slovakian quota system (Kubeková, 2024). In certain nations, the quota is only applicable to companies or organizations that employ a minimum number of people, usually at least 25 or 50 (Buchanan & Hammersley, 2023).

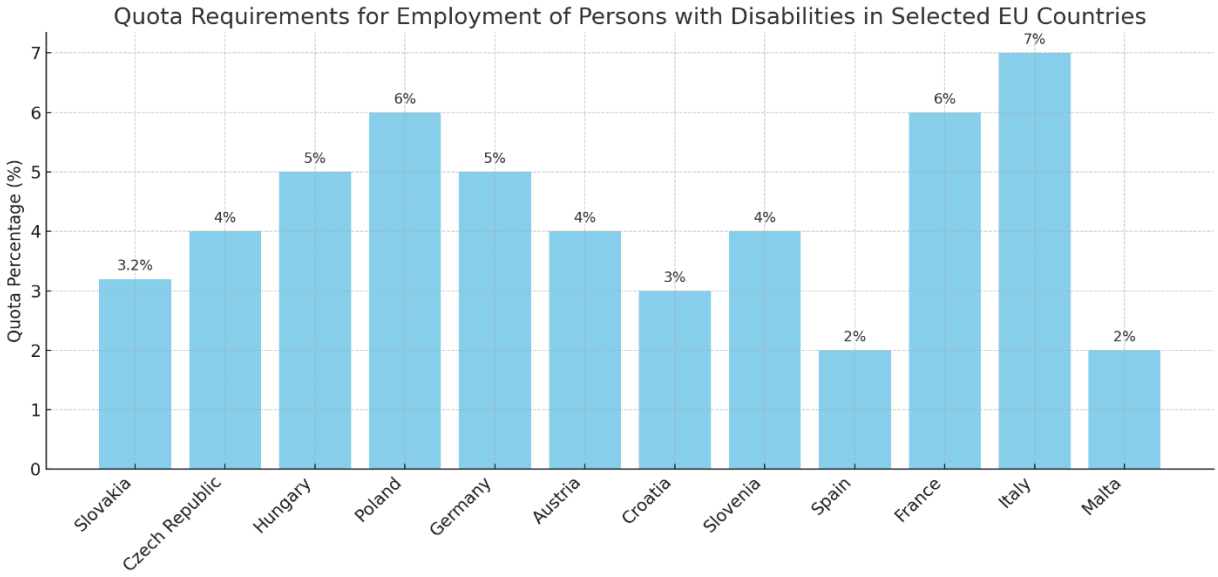


Figure 1: *Quota system for people with disabilities in selected EU countries*
Source: *MISSOC Database*

Table 1: *Disability employment quotas and company size*

Country	Size of employees	Country	Size of employees	Country	Size of employees	Country	Size of employees
Slovakia	≥ 20	Poland	≥ 25	Croatia	≥ 20	France	≥ 20
Czech Republic	≥ 25	Germany	≥ 20	Slovenia	> 20	Italy	> 50
Hungary	≥ 25	Austria	≥ 25	Spain	≥ 50	Malta	≥ 20

Source: *MISSOC Database*

Slovakia's hiring quota for disabled workers is lower than that of its neighboring EU nations, although it covers a larger spectrum of enterprises. In their 2020 review of Groups at Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion Spending, Tomáš et al. (2020) suggest raising the statutory percentage or quota system from the current 3.2% to 5% in order to promote the integration of individuals with disabilities into the open labor market and the burgeoning field of social entrepreneurship.

Some Member States permit the use of alternative measures to meet quotas. These, in practice include outsourcing work to sheltered employment organizations or social enterprises that employ people with disabilities, or buying goods and services from businesses that do so (Buchanan & Hammersley, 2023). In order to fulfill this obligation, employers who do not directly employ people with disabilities can: a) award the contract to a company that employs people with disabilities or to self-employed people with disabilities; b) purchase goods or services from sheltered workshops or sheltered workplaces, from self-employed people with disabilities, or from employers who employ people with disabilities; c) pay a levy equal to 0.9 times the total labor cost of the national average monthly wage for each person with a disability who should be employed in order to meet the required quota; or d) a combination of the aforementioned options. 3) Decreased contributions to society. Employers and employees with disabilities are required to make fewer health and social contributions. Contributions to health are halved (European Comission, 2024).

Table 2: *Options of compliance with the quota system to hire people with disabilities*

Method of compliance	Method of counting
Awarding a contract to an integrational enterprise, sheltered shop or sheltered workplace where person with disability conducts or operates self-employment activity	A contract amounting to 0.8 multiple of the total labour cost calculated based on the average wage of an employee in the Slovak economy is counted as 1 citizen with disability.
Awarding a designated contract in a public tender for registered integrational social enterprises, sheltered shops or sheltered workplaces (from 2018)	A contract amounting to EUR 2,000 (bid price) is counted as 1 citizen with disability
Payment of the non-compliance levy	0.9 multiple of the total labour cost calculated based on the average wage of an employee in the Slovak economy for each citizen needed to meet the statutory percentage

Source: *Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic*

The law gives employers the possibility to meet this requirement by contracting goods and services suitable for the employment of persons with disabilities in the amount of €1,369 and €1,198 respectively for each missing employee with a disability (amounts applicable in 2023). The third choice is to pay a non-compliance charge, which in 2023 was €1,540 for each individual with disability who is "missing." It is also possible to achieve the disability quota by combining the aforementioned choices (Kubeková, 2024).

Quotas are also sometimes compared to a charitable approach, which would entail selecting people with disability for a job based only on their impairment. Consequently, it is important to remember that a single quota policy is insufficient to ensure that people with disabilities are integrated into the workforce (Dominic & Relandeau, 2017).

2.4.2. Supported Employment

According to Tomáš et al. (2020), supported employment is a collection of specific services designed for individuals who are (socially/healthily) disadvantaged and focuses on obtaining and retaining employment in an open labor market. Supported employment aims to assist individuals

with disabilities, especially those with severe disabilities, in integrating into competitive work environments alongside non-disabled individuals (Dispenza, 2019).These programs offer government-subsidized transportation, assistive technology, specialized coaching, skills training, and individualized supervision. Many of these programs, however, are restricted to social companies that compete in the market but primarily focus on giving disabled people experience and job chances (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2020).

The fundamental idea is that a person with disability is trained in a number of job-related duties, assigned to a suitable work environment, receives ongoing training while working, and subsequently receives long-term follow-up. The goal is to support individuals with disabilities in maintaining and even improving their employment for as long as possible, all the while fostering a sense of independence (Dispenza, 2019). Service packages adjust to each person's unique needs and abilities both within and outside of the workplace. For instance, they could involve professional counseling, evaluating job seekers' professional abilities and skills, helping them prepare for the workforce, finding a suitable job, offering professional advice to the employer on how to change the job role and create working conditions that meet the needs of the disadvantaged individual, and providing mentoring or support once the individual is hired (Tomáš et al., 2020).

In several countries, non-state providers offer supported employment services to disadvantaged job searchers on the labor market (Privara, 2018). For example, Slovakia's supported employment agencies are non-state suppliers of employment services for long-term unemployed people and persons with impairments. They don't, however, get systemic assistance. After assessing compliance with specific requirements, the Central Labor Office grants licenses to the supported employment agencies. However, the lack of specific funding and operating guidelines in the law means that these agencies' work is neither routinely financed by public funds nor closely supervised (Tomáš et al., 2020). Furthermore, according to Privara (2018), agencies for supported employment are non-state organizations that assist in the employment of people with disabilities. These are mostly private businesses, non-profits, and individuals. At the municipal and regional levels, the agencies are primarily run on a voluntary basis and are paid according to the services they offer (employers pay the agency for conducting consultations and choosing qualified candidates). For instance, in Slovakia the Agency of Supported Employment in Bratislava organizes annually the Radnička Market. The employers employing persons with disabilities can

sell their products and build networks and partnerships. The market also aims at increasing awareness amongst employers who have an obligation of disability employment quota on either employing persons with disabilities, or buying products from the employers present at the market rather than paying the levy. This has been a well-known event to promote the employment of persons with disabilities at the city center. A cultural performance and workshops are held in conjunction with the market (Ondrušová, 2022). Therefore, a review by Tomáš et al. (2020) suggests that disadvantaged groups on the labor market should be given more individualized work. Potential remedies involve strengthening the state's resources in this area, collaborating more closely with non-state employment agencies or other chosen organizations that specialize in this kind of work, or a mix of the two.

According to a study conducted in the United States, supported work is a better option than sheltered employment for people with disabilities. For one thing, they save the state money and improve circumstances for entry into the labor market, including wages. A significant portion of people never leave the sheltered environment for the open labor market, and workers in sheltered employments receive various forms of help for a significantly longer period of time than those in supported employment (Cimera, 2011).

2.4.3. Sheltered Workshop

In the EU, sheltered workshops are not commonly defined, except from the fact that they are organizations that exclusively hire disabled persons (Jacqueline et al., 2015). However, Section 55(1) of the Employment Services Act of Slovakia indicated, a sheltered workshop is a workplace where a legal or natural person establishes more than one workplace for a citizen with a disability with difficult access to the labour market, where working conditions, including the distribution of working hours and demands for work performance, are adapted to the health condition of a citizen with a disability with difficult access to the labour market and where he or she works in an employment relationship at least 50% of citizens with disabilities with difficult access to the labour market (*Sheltered Workshop and Sheltered Workplace - Section 55 > ÚPSVaR*, n.d.).

Sheltered workshops, which were created in the 1960s to help People with disabilities who could not find employment on the open market, provide a workplace that is adapted to the needs of people with disabilities and are designed to help employees grow personally and professionally. In order to ensure that people with disabilities are treated equally in (have access to) employment,

these workshops are one of the primary policy responses to international and EU legal frameworks (Bezzina et al., 2022). Sheltered workshops come in two main different types: People with disabilities who are unable to work in the open labor market can find long-term, permanent employment in traditional sheltered workplaces. The goal of transitional sheltered workshops is to give people with disabilities the assistance and skills they require to find non-sheltered work (Jacqueline et al., 2015).

The function of sheltered workshops or workplaces in labor market integration is one of the most frequently debated topics surrounding them. Even so, they make employment easier, particularly for those with severe or mental disability. They have also drawn criticism because they frequently result in career dead ends for these individuals (Rodriguez & Cueto, 2014). Similarly Kubeková (2024) pointed out that the issue with workshops and sheltered workplaces is that there is insufficient support for the shift to the open labor market. According to Bezzina et al. (2022) study on promoting employment through sheltered workshops throughout the EU, there are not enough or the right kind of policy measures in place to encourage mainstream firms to hire people with disabilities. The expansion of the sheltered labor market is being aided by this, adverse conditions in the open labor market, and substantial state funding for sheltered labor market participants. Meanwhile, a variety of organizations, including for-profit, not-for-profit (including cooperatives), and partnerships with for-profit organizations, oversee sheltered workshops throughout the EU.

Although sheltered employment is a valuable and crucial tool for integrating certain groups of people with disabilities into the workforce (such as the elderly), these workplace in Slovakia also hire people who, with the right assistance, could find employment in the open labor market. Because of this, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities criticized Slovakia in 2016 (Tomáš et al., 2020). Although those employed in the sheltered labor market are legally entitled to at least the minimum wage, they may not always have the opportunity to maximize their income. Wages are usually not paid in sheltered workshops with a rehabilitation focus. Opportunities for career growth exist in theory, but their actual implementation is dependent upon the company and an individual's abilities. Even though sheltered workshops—particularly those with a rehabilitation focus—are legally required to promote the transfer to the open labor market, this is rarely the case in reality and is occasionally viewed as a purely theoretical objective.

Employers in profit-driven sheltered employment environments are not motivated to facilitate this kind of transfer (Bezzina et al., 2022).

Various forms of sheltered employment should be developed for individuals with disabilities for whom access to open employment is impractical, as per the International Labour Organization's (ILO) recommendation No. 168, 1983, on the vocational rehabilitation and employment of people with disabilities. The intention behind restricting sheltered labor to people who are unemployed by regular companies seems to be very clear. Another suggestion backed by this recommendation is to promote collaboration between sheltered and production workshops on organizational and management issues in order to enhance the employment status of their employees with disability and, to the greatest extent feasible, assist in preparing them for employment under regular circumstances (Miguel & Vanesa, 2022).

While sheltered workshops continue to serve as essential tools for labour market inclusion, especially for those with profound support needs, a stronger policy emphasis on transition mechanisms and employer incentives is needed to realize their full integrational potential.

2.4.4. Self-Employment

Self-employment is a critical component of any successful approach to employment supports for people with disabilities (Babin et al., 2022). For those with disabilities, it may offer greater alternatives, especially for those who struggle to find stable work in the waged sector (Lorna Adams et al., 2019). Self-employment may be a viable option for some people with disability to support themselves since it gives them the flexibility they may need to manage their disability. Others can see self-employment as an alternative way to enter a competitive labor market; this strategy is demonstrated by the rise in self-employment among marginalized groups worldwide (Norstedt & Germundsson, 2022).

Though the prevalence varies among different national contexts. Compared to northern and eastern Europe, self-employment among those with disabilities is more prevalent in southern Europe (Norstedt & Germundsson, 2022). As a result, a large number of EU member states provide loans, subsidies, income support, money for workplace modifications, as well as advice, training, and assistance to encourage the self-employment and entrepreneurship of people with disabilities. Austria's individual program, for instance, exclusively offers cash aid. The self-employment allowance in Slovakia also covers workplace modifications, provided that the business is operated

by the same person for a minimum of two years (Buchanan & Hammersley, 2023). Additionally, the sectorial distribution of self-employed workers differs significantly by gender. Women self-employed primarily in health and social work (28.0%), professional, scientific, and technical activities (15.9%), and other services (12.9%), while men self-employed primarily in manufacturing (14.1%) and construction (39.2%). The health and social work professions still have a typical gender distribution, with only 1.6% of men working in these disciplines and 2.6% of women working in the construction industry. Construction (22.1%) and health and social work (16.5%) account for the majority of older self-employed people (OECD, 2018).

Depending on the average salary in Slovakia (Bratislava region), as well as the average salary and unemployment rate in each district (Trnava, Nitra, Žilina, Banská Bystrica, Prešov, Košice regions), the Office of Labour Social Affairs and Family also offers financial assistance for individuals with disabilities to work for themselves (Privara, 2018). Thus, the central office may provide a self-employment allowance to partially cover the costs related to the operation of a self-employment activity to a job seeker who has been registered in the register of job seekers for at least three months, if he or she requests the allowance in writing (The Slovak Republic Ministry of Justice: On Vocational Education and Traning and on Amendements on Certain Acts, 2015). For partial reimbursement of costs related to the operation of a self-employed person, the Office will provide 60% of the awarded contribution within 30 calendar days from the date of conclusion of the agreement on the provision of the contribution and the remaining part, i.e. 40% of the awarded contribution**,** will be provided after submission of documents on the use of at least 60% of the amount of the awarded and already paid contribution. Subsequently, the recipient of the contribution is obliged to submit to the Office other remaining documents so that all documents on the operation of the self-employed person up to the amount of 100% of the provided and paid contribution are submitted to the Office no later than 12 months from the date of conclusion of the agreement on the provision of the contribution, because this is a contribution that the recipient of the contribution will use to establish a job where he will operate a self-employed person (Labor Social Affairs and Family Office, 2025).

In the Slovak Republic, nearly half of the working-age population (45.9%) stated that they were unable to launch a business between 2013 and 2017 because they were afraid of failing. However, the only concrete steps are to educate and motivate jobless youth to apply for self-employment

grants. There seems to be minimal strategic coordination among the various important stakeholders, despite the fact that these actions are coordinated through a number of ministries and other government agencies. Youth entrepreneurship support is frequently monitored, but more thorough assessments are uncommon (OECD, 2018).

2.5. Employment Challenges of People with Disability

People with disabilities work as productive workers, self-employed individuals, and business owners in a variety of professions, contributing significantly to national economies and society across the globe. When given the right conditions, people with disabilities can perform most jobs, be productive, and participate in profitable businesses (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2020).

However, obtaining and maintaining employment is difficult for a lot of persons with disability (Bonaccio et al., 2019). In both affluent and developing countries, people with disability are disproportionately excluded from the work force (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2020). In Slovakia the integration of persons with disabilities in the open labour market remains low and faces several difficulties. One of the main challenges is the existence of ad-hoc, project-based initiatives rather than a long-term strategic vision for the labour integration of persons with disabilities. Systematic support for the transition from the sheltered to the open labour market is completely missing. Due to the existence of rather directive, partly motivating policies and measures coupled with a lack of advisory services and accompaniment for employers (the public support is centered mainly around granting financial allowances), the employment of persons with disabilities in the open labour market remains predominantly at the willingness of employers (Kubeková, 2024).

People with disabilities often experience a variety of challenges in their journey of employment. The most commonly cited barriers include: attitudinal, physical and communication (environmental), and structural (Meaney-Davis & Coe, 2020). As a result, individuals frequently still struggle to find and keep good jobs, which is made worse by intersecting identities such as gender identity, age, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity. To advance social justice both domestically and internationally, it is necessary to combat disability-based discrimination and the unfair treatment of people with disabilities (ILO, 2023).

2.5.1. Attitudinal Barriers

Attitudinal barriers pose significant challenges to the employment prospects of individuals with disabilities. These barriers are deeply entrenched in societal attitudes and stereotypes that portray individuals with disabilities as less competent or valuable, leading to discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization (Chan & Hutchings, 2023). While disparities in educational and skill development resources can influence their employability, the prevailing and primary obstacles to the successful employment of young people with disabilities remain negative attitudes about disability and discrimination based on disability (Papakonstantinou et al., 2018).

Categorized under attitudinal barriers are various forms of discrimination against people with disabilities, including unconscious bias and assumptions about the cost of reasonable accommodations or the capabilities of people with disabilities; stigma; abuse; low self-esteem; and limited social networks (Meaney-Davis & Coe, 2020). Employers' misconceptions, reflecting broader societal attitudes, also contribute to these barriers. Despite evidence supporting the benefits of diversity in the workforce, many employers perceive individuals with disabilities as less productive and underestimate the minimal costs associated with workplace adaptations (ILO & OECD, 2018). For instance, People with visual impairments have complained about employers' negative and discriminatory attitudes, wrong beliefs about their requirements and skills, and the difficulty of clarifying myths and demonstrating one's talents as a candidate with visual impairment (Castle, 2024).

These negative attitudes often discourage people with disabilities from disclosing their condition, preventing them from requesting necessary workplace adjustments, which can lead to absenteeism and presenteeism (working while sick). Discrimination in the recruiting process, which is encouraged by outmoded stigmas and the stereotypical emphasis on inability (Papakonstantinou et al., 2018), exacerbates these issues. Research by Lindsay et al. (2015) highlighted the disparity in employment rates between people with physical disabilities and their non-disabled peers, due to different attitudes towards them, and expectations of them. This discrepancy has profound effects on the social integration, self-image, and self-esteem of people with disabilities, hindering their financial independence and earning potential (Miller & Kass, 2023).

Licite-Kurbe & Sevcuna (2023) found that society's negative stereotypes about people with disabilities can lead to discrimination and exclusion, influencing hiring decisions, workplace

accommodations, and overall treatment within the workplace in Latvia. Therefore, despite their qualifications and potential contributions to the workforce, employers are frequently discouraged from hiring people with disabilities due to unfavorable views and misconceptions about their abilities (Papakonstantinou et al., 2018). Misconceptions about the cost of accommodation persist, despite evidence showing that most accommodations are either inexpensive or free (Jones, 2016). People with disabilities face decreased expectations and possibilities due to stigma and unconscious bias, which exacerbates their underemployment and unemployment (Groce, 2018). Addressing these attitudinal barriers is essential for fostering inclusive workplaces where people with disabilities can thrive and contribute meaningfully.

2.5.2. Physical Barriers

Physical and environmental barriers significantly impact the ability of people with disabilities to participate fully in the workplace. Chan and Hutchings (2023) highlight that these barriers often appear outside the home environment, including a lack of architectural accommodations such as ramps and elevators (Weerasinghe et al., 2015), inadequate visual, tactile, or acoustic signaling, and insufficient adapted transportation (WHO, 2010). Consequently, many workplaces remain partially or entirely inaccessible to people with disabilities, particularly those with mobility or visual impairments. These barriers extend beyond the physical workspace to affect access to job interviews, training opportunities, work-related travel, and social events, often due to high costs associated with accessible transport options (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2020). This inaccessibility can be attributed to a lack of awareness, outdated infrastructure, and inadequate consideration of diverse needs during workspace design and organization (Weerasinghe et al., 2015).

Olney and Donoso (2019) emphasize the visible barrier posed by inaccessible architectural design, including the absence of ramps and elevators, narrow doorways and hallways, and restrooms lacking necessary accommodations. Beyond physical access, sensory barriers also present challenges. Shahin et al. (2020) note issues such as poor lighting, excessive noise, and a lack of visual cues and signage, which can hinder people with visual impairments or sensory sensitivities. Additionally, Lacey (2014) discusses the challenges posed by non-ergonomically designed workstations and furniture, including non-adjustable desks and chairs, and inaccessible office

equipment controls, further complicating the workplace experience for those with mobility or dexterity limitations.

Anand and Sevak (2017) found that approximately 1/3 of unemployed people with disabilities cited inaccessible workplaces or transportation as employment barriers. Their study, published in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, underscores the significant impact of physical inaccessibility on employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Interestingly, the research also revealed a positive correlation between receiving workplace accommodations such as transportation assistance or flexible schedules and employment status among individuals with disabilities, suggesting that such supports could effectively facilitate employment. Moreover, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (2020) highlights that access to information and inaccessible working tools, including information communication technology equipment, pose additional obstacles for those with visual, hearing, or cognitive impairments, particularly in environments lacking reasonable adjustments. These barriers not only limit participation but also prevent individuals from performing tasks for which they are otherwise qualified.

In conclusion, addressing physical and environmental barriers in workplaces is crucial for promoting inclusivity and equal employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Efforts should focus on improving architectural accessibility, enhancing sensory environments, providing ergonomic furniture and equipment, and offering necessary workplace accommodations to overcome these challenges.

2.5.3. Institutional Barriers

Institutional barriers are systemic obstacles that hinder the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labor market. According to Burns and Oswald (2015), such barriers often arise when there is either no legal framework for disability inclusion or when existing laws such as those mandating inclusive and accessible programs, policies, and activities are poorly implemented or enforced. These frameworks are intended to ensure reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities, yet their weak application results in continued exclusion. Even when discrimination is not intentional, institutional systems can indirectly marginalize people with disabilities by failing to consider their specific needs (WHO & World Bank, 2011). These barriers are embedded within

laws, policies, strategies, or practices that either directly or indirectly discriminate against persons with disabilities (Charles et al., 2023).

One of the most significant institutional barriers is the lack of inclusive education and vocational training. Research consistently shows that people with disabilities face substantial difficulties accessing quality education and skills training. Without these foundational opportunities, they are often unprepared for the demands of competitive employment. Inclusive education systems that recognize and accommodate diverse learning needs are essential for equipping persons with disabilities to succeed in the workforce. Another persistent challenge is the inadequate implementation of anti-discrimination legislation and employment quotas. While many countries have established laws to protect the rights of people with disabilities, these are frequently under-enforced or inconsistently applied (Ismail & Hussein, 2022). Moreover, quota systems intended to guarantee a minimum employment threshold for persons with disabilities are often ignored or poorly monitored (Baker et al., 2018). This lack of accountability undermines their intended impact.

Employer-related barriers also play a key role. Many employers and service providers lack the knowledge or confidence to adopt disability-inclusive employment practices. Studies reveal that employers often underestimate the capabilities of persons with disabilities and are uncertain about how to implement necessary accommodations (Castle, 2024). This can lead to discriminatory hiring decisions or hesitation to invest in inclusive practices. As such, targeted training programs and awareness campaigns are vital to promote understanding and shift attitudes within the workplace (Brunes & Heir, 2022). Furthermore, people with disabilities often encounter limited opportunities for career advancement. Research highlights significant barriers to promotion, often stemming from biased perceptions or inaccessible organizational practices (Bialik & Mhiri, 2022). Inclusive promotion policies and targeted interventions to support upward mobility can significantly improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities (Charles et al., 2023).

Finally, access to healthcare remains a critical yet overlooked factor affecting employment for persons with disabilities. Inadequate or inaccessible healthcare services can exacerbate health-related barriers to employment and limit the ability to maintain consistent work. Access to comprehensive healthcare including rehabilitation services and assistive technologies is essential for enabling full and sustained workforce participation (Chabot, 2013; Charles et al., 2023).

2.6. Theoretical Framework

2.6.1. Social Model

According to the social model, disability is viewed as an unequal relationship in a society where individuals with disabilities frequently have their demands ignored. Physical, organizational, and attitude impediments prevent people with disabilities from participating in society at large, which renders them disabled (Carson, 2009). Thus, society is considered to "disable" them. Therefore, eliminating these obstacles is the better course of action than the alternative Medical Model of Disability, which depends on healing everyone with a disability (Spectrum Centre for Independent Living, 2018). The history of the disability rights movement is where the social model of disability starts. In North America, a number of groups, including sociologists, individuals with disability, and political organizations that support disability, started to distance themselves from the conventional medical perspective on disability around 1970. Rather, they started talking about issues like accessibility, civil rights, and injustice. Due to this shift in conversation, disability was conceptualized in ways that were based on social constructions (Oliver, 2013).

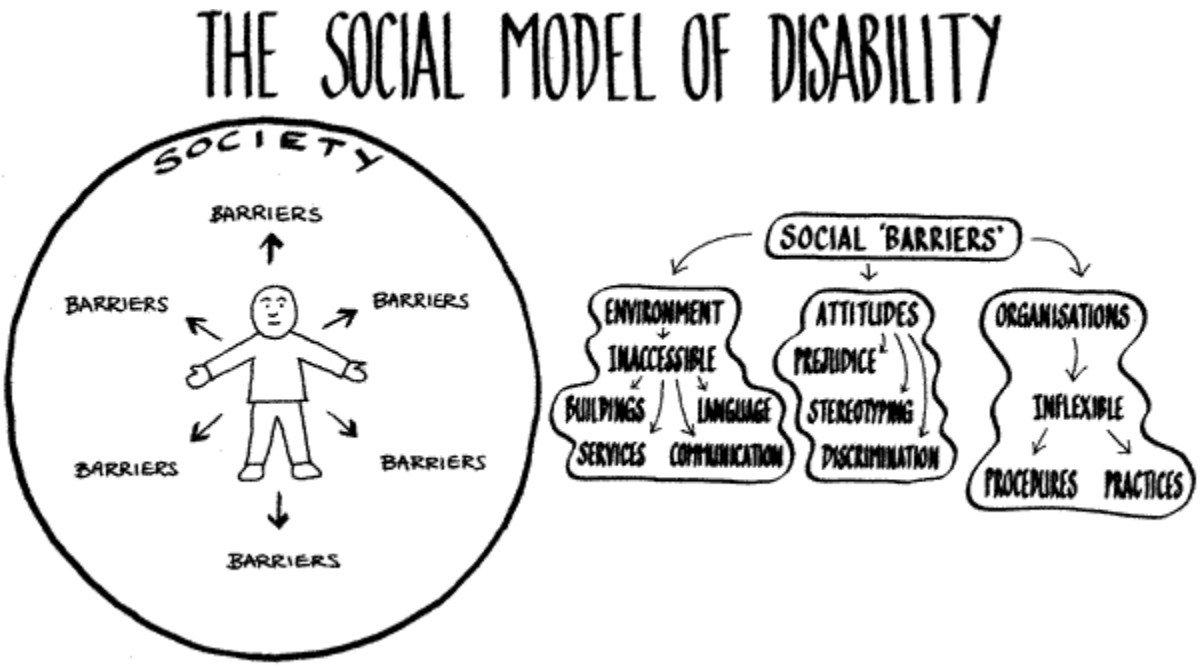


Figure 2: Social model of disability

Source: *Democracy disability and society group (2003)*

The social model aims to eliminate unneeded obstacles that keep persons with disabilities from living freely, working, and participating in society. The social model inquires as to how obstacles to inclusion might be eliminated. Additionally, it acknowledges that prejudices against individuals with disabilities create needless obstacles to inclusion, and that individuals must strive proactively to eliminate these obstacles (Parliamentry and health service Ombudsman, 2023). The model views disability from the standpoint of human rights, characterizing it as a consequence of social neglect or discrimination against the needs of those with disabilities. According to the model, many persons with disabilities will be seen as having diverse abilities and more opportunities to engage in society if the obstacles are removed, as opposed to having disabilities and being unable to do so (Gottlieb et al., 2010).

Therefore, in reaction to social oppression, social model thinking requires the removal of barriers, anti-discrimination laws, independent living, and other measures. From the standpoint of disability rights, social model methods are progressive (Shakespeare, 2006).

2.6.2. Intersectionality Theory

A helpful strategy for combining contextual elements with disability and other facets of one's identity is intersectionality (Aurora et al., 2020). With the realization of the unique oppression and disadvantage experienced by Black women in the US, it first emerged to examine the relationship between race and gender (Wickenden, 2023). Later, in 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw came up with the term "intersectionality," which has since spread around the globe as a promising idea that helps people grasp the intersections of various axes of power. Various fields have taken notice of the concept (Sen et al., 2009).



Figure 3: Intersectionality theory

Source: *Diversity and ability, 2019:* https://medium.com/dna-s-blog/identity-beyond-disability-3d59d19b1dad

According to intersectionality theory, a person's experiences are influenced by their race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and other facets of their identity in addition to their disability (Brooks, 2021). It looks at how understanding the employment of people with disabilities requires an understanding of various social identities (Chan & Hutchings, 2023). Through the lens of intersectionality, categories are seen as processes that mutually constitute one another. Intersectionality aims to comprehend the distinct experiences and viewpoints at the intersection of two or more social or cultural categories and positions that converge as difficult, overlapping, interacting, and frequently contradicting systems, as opposed to adding categories to one another (Hancock, 2007). In addition to promoting inclusivity, reflexivity, and anti-essentialism, scholars argue for incorporating intersectionality within disability studies study. This method is essential for creating policies that take into account the complexity of crossing identities (Wickenden, 2023). The labor market often presents unique challenges for people with disabilities. Brooks (2021) discusses the case for intersectionality, emphasizing that an intersectional look at disability in the labor market is essential. The employment disparities faced by people with disabilities are further

complicated when intersecting with other marginalized identities (Chan & Hutchings, 2023). Brooks (2021) further supports the case for intersectionality in the labor market, highlighting how the intersection of disability with other identities can significantly impact employment opportunities and outcomes. This intersectional perspective is essential for developing policies and practices that are truly inclusive and equitable.

Chan and Hutchings (2023) explore the inequalities, barriers, and facilitators of careers for women with disabilities, using intersectionality as a theoretical framework. They identify how demographic factors like race, gender, and disability intersect to influence career progression and development opportunities for women with disabilities. Brinkman et al. (2022) argue for a shift in discourse on disability towards an inclusive, intersectional focus, emphasizing the importance of considering multiple identities and their intersections. This perspective is crucial for understanding the unique challenges and opportunities faced by people with disabilities, particularly those who are also marginalized due to other aspects of their identity.

According to Cole (2009), research that is informed by intersectionality should take into account who is included in a social category. When it comes to disability research, researchers could take into account individuals with disabilities from different socioeconomic origins or geographical areas, as well as those with a variety of apparent and invisible disabilities. Therefore, the mindset and terminology to analyze the relationships and interdependencies across social categories and systems are provided by the critical framework or approach known as intersectionality. Because it improves analytical sophistication and provides theoretical explanations of how heterogeneous members of particular groups (like women) might experience the workplace differently depending on their ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, and other social locations, intersectionality is important for both researchers and practitioners (Atewologun, 2018).

Like other identities, disability is socially created, subject to misrepresentation, and frequently isolated from other problems and experiences. Every individual has a variety of identities and statuses, and some people consider themselves to belong to one or more marginalized identities (Brooks, 2021). As a result, identity is a diverse, fluid, and ever-changing phenomenon. Furthermore, not all individuals with disabilities would have seen the same degree of stigma in a community because there are differences and variations among categories or groups. The forms of

oppression and disadvantages that persons with disabilities face in various contexts exhibit both obvious similarities and differences (Wickenden, 2023).

2.6.3. Relationship of the Theories

The social model, according to Acker-Verney (2021), focuses on the social barriers that people with disabilities face, whereas intersectionality provides a means of examining and comprehending how gender, disability, and the availability of supports influence the experiences and decisions of individuals and communities of people with disabilities. Additionally, it emphasizes how these elements impact the experience. Therefore, the social model of disability provides the framework for understanding disability as a social construct, while intersectionality theory enriches this understanding by considering the complex interplay of identities.

Conclusion

The social model places a greater focus on people with disabilities in general and does not always consider gender and identity. The social model is supplemented with intersectionality theory to close this gap.

By using the social model, it is possible to explore how societal attitudes, discrimination, inaccessible environments, and other systemic barriers contribute to the limited employment opportunities for people with visual impairments. Social model of disability also will help to analyze existing employment policies and practices, evaluating how they either support or hinder the participation of people with disabilities in the workforce.

At the same time incorporating Intersectionality theory in this thesis helped to explore how factors beyond disability such as age and gender compounds the challenges faced by people with visual impairments in the job market. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the unique barriers different subgroups within the disabled community may encounter and highlights the importance of addressing multiple dimensions of diversity in employment policies and practices. It enriches this research with a more comprehensive understanding of the multiple dimensions of disadvantage and privilege that intersect with disability, contributing to a more comprehensive analysis of employment opportunities and challenges. Incorporating intersectionality theory also explore how people with visual impairment from different age, gender, and socio-economic backgrounds experience distinct challenges and opportunities in the workforce

CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHOD

3.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a thorough explanation of the research design, methodology, data source, study area, sampling strategy, data collection instruments, analytical techniques, and ethical considerations.

3.2. Study Design

The aim of this study is to investigate the employment opportunities and challenges of people with visual impairment in Slovakia. To achieve this end the researcher has used qualitative research design. Qualitative research is created to gather non-numerical data to produce insights. The aim of qualitative research is to gain comprehensive understanding of social phenomena, which includes their quality, phenomena in their natural environments. It relies on the direct experiences of people as meaning-making agents in their daily lives and focuses on the why rather than what of social phenomena (Ugwu & Val, 2023). To understand the employment opportunities and challenges of people with visual impairment it is crucial to explore their experience in the employment sector. Therefore, the qualitative research method is perfect for understanding the experience of people with visual impairment in the labor market of Slovakia.

3.3. Study Population

The participant of the study is consisted of people with visual impairment, representatives from Blind and Partially sighted unions, and staff of Labour, Social affairs, and Family office of Slovakia. People with visual impairment were chosen as a target group due to the researcher's personal experience during undergraduate studies at home country Ethiopia, where the researcher had classmates with disabilities; four with visual impairment and two with physical disabilities. The people with visual impairment took years to find employment, whereas those with physical disabilities found jobs within a few months after graduation.

Furthermore, as part of the study requirements for this master's program, the researcher completed an internship at the Access Center TUKE in Košice, Slovakia. During this internship, the researcher had the opportunity to participate in a seminar held in Stará Lesná. The seminar focused

on support for students with specific needs at university and the preparation of secondary school pupils with special educational needs for university admission. One of the presenters was a person with a visual impairment who is the president of one of the Blind and Partially Sighted unions in Slovakia. Their presentation on the experiences of the community of people with disability further inspired the researcher to focus the study specifically on people with visual impairments.

3.3.1. Inclusion Criteria

I. For people with visual impairment:

1. Participants must be employed full-time
2. Participants must have 3 years and above work experience
3. Participants must be currently employed

II. For Blind and partially sighted union participant:

1. Participants must be in the position of either president or vice president of the union

III. For Labour, Social affairs and Family Office:

1. Participant must involve in roles related to employment of people with disability

3.3.2. Exclusion Criteria

I. For people with visual impairment:

1. People with visual impairment who are currently unemployed
2. People with visual impairment who are currently employed part -time

3.People with other type of disability

II. For Blind and partially sighted union participant:

1. Participant who is not in position of either president or vice president of the union

III. For Labour, Social affairs and Family Office:

1. Participant who is not involved in roles related to employment of people with visual impairment

3.4. Sample Size

A total of 7 people with visual impairment, aged between 30-40, were selected from different employment sectors for a semi-structured interview. For the purpose of data triangulation 2 Blind and Partially Sighted union representatives, and 1 staff from Labour, Social affairs, and Family Office has participated in the interview. Therefore, after 7 interview and triangulation of the interview data it was believed that the data collection has reached a saturation point.

3.5. Sampling Technique

The participants in this study were chosen using a purposive and snowball selection technique. Participants who met the study's inclusion requirements were chosen through the use of purposeful sampling. Purposive sampling, according to Bryman (2012), enables researchers to select participants based on the purpose of the study and their relevance to the research questions. To reach more participants through recommendations, particularly those who belong to community of visual impairment and organizations, snowball sampling was also used. Snowball sampling is particularly useful for accessing hard-to-reach populations and building trust within specific social networks (Noy, 2008). Therefore, combining both methods enabled the researcher to identify key informants and expand the sample population effectively.

3.6. Study Area

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research involves the study subjects experiencing the problem being studied. The researcher decided to concentrate on Slovakia's



Slovakia, officially known as the Slovak Republic, is a landlocked country in Central Europe. It is bordered by Poland to the north, Ukraine to the east, Hungary to the south, Austria to the west, and the Czech Republic to the northwest. The country has a population of over 5.4 million people and covers an area of about 49,000 square kilometers. Slovakia has a rich history and a distinct culture, with a mostly mountainous landscape (Worldometer, 2023). There are approximately 32% of people with disability in Slovakia in year of 2023 (Eurostat, 2024) .

Figure 4: *Map of Slovakia*

Source: https://www.britannica.com/place/Slovakia

3.7. Data Collection Instrument

For this qualitative study, the primary data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview guide, carefully developed to explore the employment opportunities and challenges of people with visual impairments in Slovakia. This method was chosen for its ability to balance consistency in question structure across participants with the flexibility to explore individual experiences in

depth, particularly through follow-up why and how questions that are central to qualitative inquiry (Adams, 2015; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The guide was constructed based on the research questions and objectives of the study, consisting primarily of open-ended questions organized around key thematic areas relevant to the topic. It also allowed space for probing to clarify or deepen responses where necessary.

3.8. Data Collection Procedure

Before administering the data-gathering instrument, the researcher followed several development and quality assurance procedures. Based on the research questions, an interview guide was developed and reviewed with the guidance of the research supervisor. The interview questions were then piloted with two people with visual impairments who were not part of the main study. Revisions were made to the guide based on the feedback received during the pilot phase.

First, the researcher explained the aim of the study, ethical considerations, and the voluntary nature of participation to all participants. Since the researcher is an international student, an introduction was also given about the background and the reason for conducting the study in Slovakia, to help build a friendly rapport with the participants. With participants' consent, the interview sessions were recorded for the purpose of transcription and analysis.

As the interview questions were open-ended, probing questions were used to encourage participants to elaborate and clarify their responses. Depending on participants' preferences and their location, interviews were conducted either face-to-face or online via Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Most interviews lasted approximately 50-60 minutes, regardless of the format. Afterward, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings verbatim using Microsoft Word 365.

3.9. Data Analysis

This qualitative research design utilized thematic analysis as the data analysis approach to identify significant patterns within the qualitative dataset. Bryman (2012) states that, data analysis involves organizing and making sense of collected information. Thematic analysis was used in this study to organize and analyze the data. First, MAXQDA version 24.7 software was used to enter the verbatim transcriptions of the interviews. To find developing themes and subthemes, the transcripts were examined several times. After that, particular codes were given to these subjects in order to symbolize them. Finally, the data was analyzed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the employment opportunities and challenges faced by people with visual impairments in Slovakia.

To further safeguard the participants' privacy, the researcher used anonymous codes throughout the study procedure. See table 3

Table 3: *Data analysis code of participants*

Participant	Analysis code
People with visual impairment	B
Blind and Partially Sighted Unions	BU1
	BU2
Labour, Social affairs, and Family Office	LSF

3.10. Ethical Considerations

The researcher adhered to ethical research standards throughout the study process. Obtaining informed consent from participants was the initial step. After securing consent, the researcher ensured that participants felt comfortable and confident in sharing information related to the study topic. Participants were reassured that all information provided would be used solely for research purposes, encouraging open and honest responses. Furthermore, each informant was informed in advance that their real names would not be used in the reporting of findings. To maintain confidentiality, the researcher assigned code names to all participants, reinforcing their trust and willingness to participate.

3.11. Limitations of the Study

While this study was carefully designed and conducted, certain constraints should be acknowledged. One challenge was the presence of language barriers during interviews with some participants who were not fluent in English. To address this, efforts were made to rephrase questions, use accessible language, and allow participants to respond in their preferred manner. However, there remains a possibility that some details or meanings may not have been fully captured. Additionally, the study was conducted in a single country, which may limit the broader applicability of the findings to other cultural or geographic contexts. It is also important to note that the study focused solely on employed people with visual impairments, meaning the experiences of unemployed or economically inactive individuals were not represented. These contextual considerations highlight areas for further research rather than weaknesses in the current study design.

CHAPTER FOUR
FINDING AND DISCUSSION

4. Introduction

This chapter presents the key findings of the study, focusing on the employment opportunities and challenges of people with visual impairment in Slovakia. Building up on the theoretical framework and methodological approach outlined in the previous chapters, this section aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the data gathered via semi-structured interviews. The analysis of the interview findings was conducted using a qualitative approach involving a thematic analysis of the data. Therefore, the demographic information of the participants is presented below to provide a clearer understanding of their backgrounds and qualifications.

4.1. Socio- Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

A total number of 10 (N=10) people participated in the semi- structured interview; 7 people with visual impairment who are a full-time employee, 2 Blind and Partially sighted unions, and 1 participant from Labour, Social affairs, and Family Office. See table 4 and 5

Table 4: *Participants with visual impairment*

Participants with code of analysis	Sex	Level of Education	Years of experience	Employment setting	Employment type
B1	M	PhD in software engineering	5	Higher education	Full-time
B2	F	Bachelor's degree	12	Private company	Full-time
B3	F	Master's degree	5	Private company	Full-time
B4	M	PhD in software engineering	10	Higher education	Full-time
B5	F	PhD in Special education	12	Higher education	Full-time
B6	M	Master's degree	14	Government agency	Full-time
B7	M	PhD in social work	6	Government agency	Full-time

Table 5: *Representatives from blind and partially sighted unions and labour, social affair, and family office*

Organizations with code of analysis	Target population	Role of the representative participant	Mission
BU1	Blind and Partially Sighted	President of the union	Advocacy and activation of visually impaired people Advocacy and activation of people with visual impairment
BU2	Blind and Partially Sighted	President of the union	Counseling and support for people with visual impairment
LSF	General public, people with disabilities, families, job seekers	Researcher	Create and implement policies in labour, social inclusion, and family welfare, including the protection and integration of people with disabilities

4.2. Themes

The following table is divided into three categories: main themes, sub-themes, and emerging sub-themes. The research question and objectives revealed the four major themes, the interview questions provided ten sub-themes, and the coding of the interview transcriptions yielded one emerging sub-theme. This chapter presents the main theme, sub-theme and emerging sub-theme with categories that further explain the findings followed by detailed analysis in the discussion.

Table 6: *Themes of the study*

Main Theme	Sub theme
Employment Opportunities	Job search and hiring experience
	Perceived employment Comparison to the general population
Support system	School to work transition • Transition support • Transition experience
	Vocational education and training
	Reasonable accommodation and career development
Perceived Strength and weakness of exiting employment measures	Strength of employment measures
	Weakness of employment measures
Employment challenges of people with visual impairment	Employment barriers in hiring practice • Employer bias and negative attitude • Lack of fair hiring practice and recruitment discrimination • Fear of accommodation and inflexible environments
	Inaccessible job application portals
	Perceived personal barriers **(**emerging subtheme) • Lack of job experience • Readiness and frustration
	Demographic variation • Age related employment barriers • Gender-based employment barriers

4.3. Theme 1: Employment Opportunities of People with Visual impairment

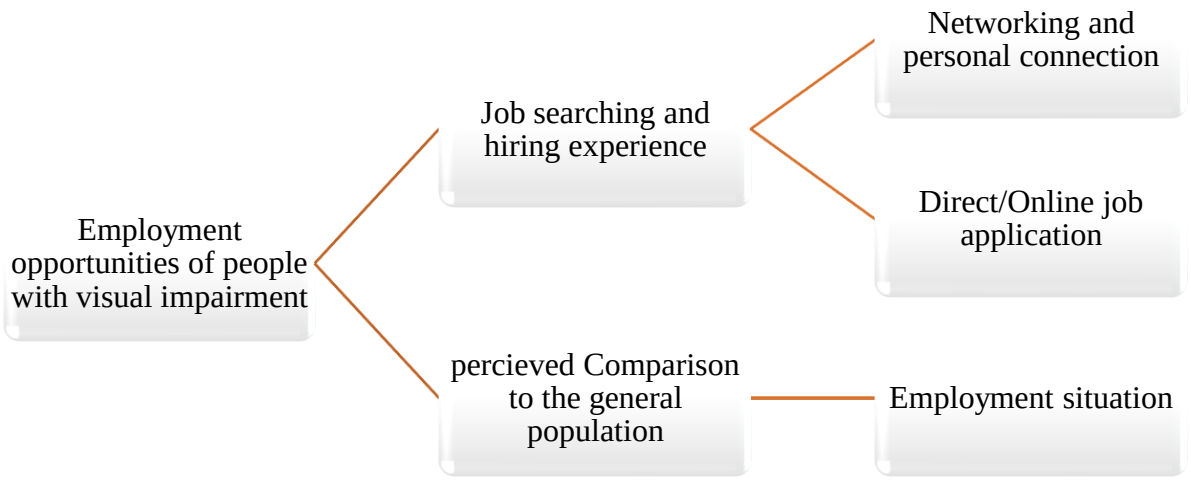


Figure 5: *Employment opportunities of people with visual impairment*

4.3.1. Job Searching and Hiring Experience

The experiences of people with visual impairments in the job search and hiring process was different from one participant to the other. Some participants explained that they found their job through networking and recommendations from friends or professors, while others indicated that they applied directly or found opportunities online. The participants stressed the significance of networking and personal connection, indicating crucial role in job searching and hiring journey that might have otherwise been inaccessible. However, those participants without such networks highlighted the extended experience of job searching often lasting months or even years.

> *"I did not actively search for this job online. After completing my bachelor's degree, I pursued my master's in the Czech Republic. One of my former professors recommended me to pursue a PhD, which led me back to this university for a faculty position." (B5)*

> *"A friend introduced me to this opportunity. Initially, I was working in another organization, and later, my friend recommended me for a full-time position." (B3)*

"I found this job online; I have been looking for a job online for 2 years after I have done my PhD." (B7)

4.3.2. Perceived Employment Comparison to the General Population

The participants emphasized the perceived low employment situation of people with disability including people with visual impairment compared to people without disability. The participants indicated that despite advancements in workplace diversity and inclusion policies, the representation of people with disabilities in various professional sectors remains disproportionately low. They attributed this disparity to the non-inclusive nature of the open labor market, which remains largely unwelcoming to individuals with disabilities.

"As the open labour market is not inclusive the employment rate of people with disability remains low." (B2)

"There is employment gap between people with disabilities and the general population. Based on the recent information, the employment of people with disability in general including people with visual impairment is low. For instance, Eurostat report shows that the employment gap between persons with and without disabilities, aged 20-64(see Appendix I), is 20%." (LSF)

The 2 blind and partially sighted union representatives also noted the low employment distribution of people with visual impairment. The perceived employment patterns of people with visual impairment in Slovakia reveal a concentration in specific sectors. The unions highlighted a significant portion of employed people with visual impairment work within institutions that provide services to people with visual impairment. Additionally, they emphasized self-employment as a common path, particularly in professions such as massage therapy, some people with visual impairment also find part-time work as language lecturers. However, the unions have noted that the number of people with visual impairment employed in the open labour market remains low.

"Out of all employed blind people, a high percentage is employed in the institutions offering services to blind and partially sighted. Then, there is quite large group of blind individuals working as self-employed people, quite often as massagers. There are also

blind people working as lecturers of language working part-times. There are few individuals employed in open labour market, but they are rather minority." (B1)

4.3.3. Discussion of Theme 1

The participants experience in job searching and hiring varied considerably, the findings of this study reveal those personal connections through friends, professors, or professional networks serve as the primary pathway to employment for people with visual impairments in Slovakia. Many participants secured jobs not through formal, open recruitment but via recommendations, informal referrals, or academic mentorship, highlighting the critical role of social capital in circumventing systemic barriers. This aligns with broader disability employment literature, which consistently finds that individuals with disabilities rely disproportionately on informal networks due to exclusion from traditional hiring processes (Lindsay et al., 2018). Similarly, Kulkarni and Gopakumar (2014) found that professionals with disabilities in India and the United States were far more likely to secure jobs through referrals than through public job postings, as employers often perceive them as "risky" hires without trusted endorsements.

While this network-based approach can serve as a helpful strategy, it simultaneously excludes those without such access, as evidenced by participants who reported extended, sometimes years-long, job searches without success. Hernandez et al. (2008) argued the network-based employment opportunity also raises equity concerns, as those without institutional affiliations or strong networks face prolonged unemployment. In addition Lund and Cmar (2019), suggested that people with disabilities often experience extended job search periods, especially when they do not have the support of a strong professional or academic network.

Regarding the perceived employment comparison to people without disability, the finding reveals that participants consistently emphasized the employment situation of people with disabilities, including those with visual impairment, was disproportionally low compared to people without disability. A 2023 European Disability Forum report confirms that across European Union member states, the employment rate for working-age people with disabilities remains 24.4 percentage points lower than for people without disability, with Slovakia showing 23.6 percentage point gaps (Buchanan & Hammersley, 2023). Similarly Goertz (2025) indicated that studies worldwide show that the employment rate of people with visual impairment is lower than the working-age people without visual impairment. For instance, a study by Marques et al. (2019) shows that people with

visual impairments in Europe face significantly higher unemployment rates compared to the general population. For example, in Portugal the employment rate of working age individuals with visual impairment is 28%.

Furthermore, the participants of this study, as well as union representatives, also identified a concentration of people with visual impairment in specific sectors particularly in disability service organizations, self-employment, and part-time work in fields like massage therapy and language teaching. This finding is supported by Jaganjac et al. (2020) who identified that the challenges in traditional employment sectors may push people with visual impairment towards self-employment as a viable option. In addition, the authors also have indicated that people with visual impairment face significant challenges in integrating into the labor market, including social stigma and employer attitudes. These challenges often limit their employment opportunities to specific sectors where accommodations and understanding of their needs are more prevalent.

4.4. Theme 2: Support System in the Employment of People with Visual Impairment

Support systems play a vital role in facilitating and enhancing employment opportunities for people with visual impairment. In this study the support systems include school to work transition, vocational training programs, reasonable accommodations and career development.

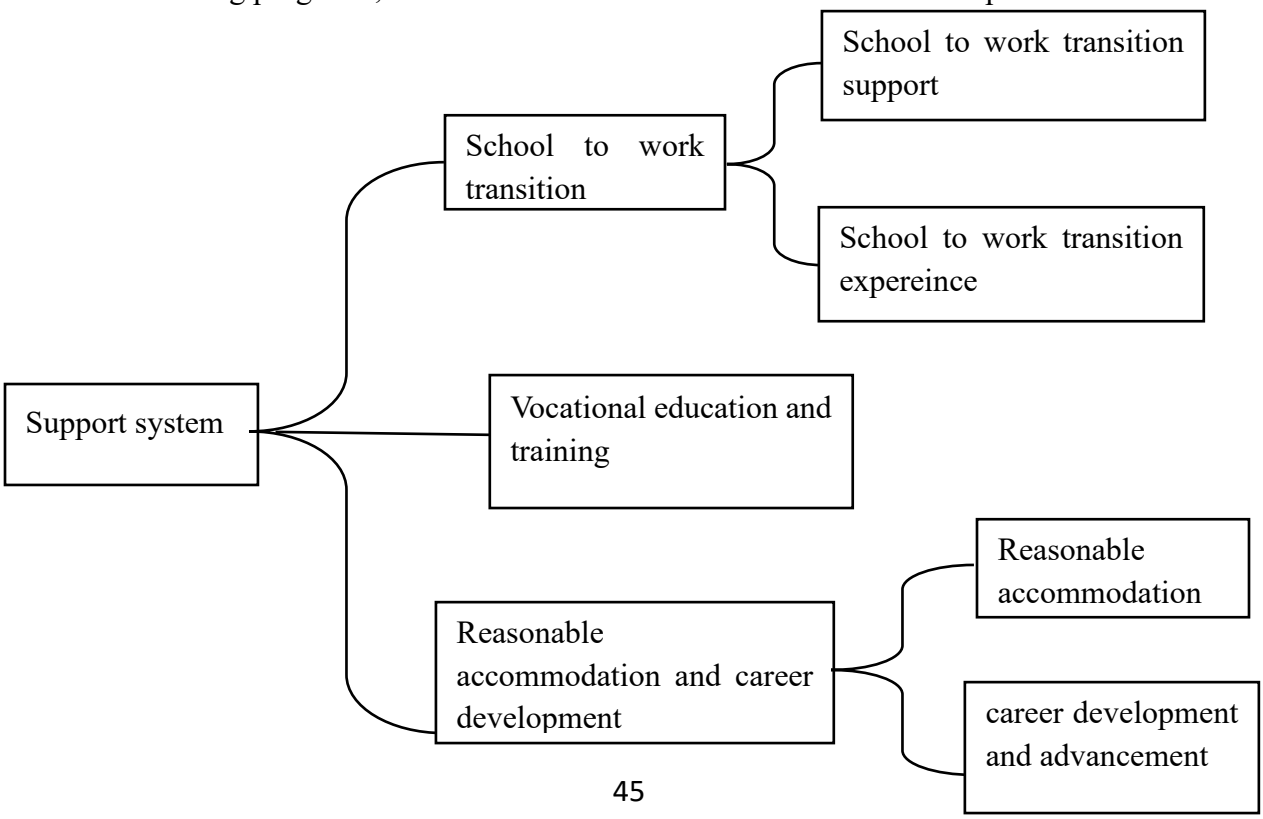


Figure 6: *Support system for the employment of people with visual impairment*

4.4.1. School-to-Work Transition

When asked about the school to work transition supports for people with visual impairment the responses shared by the participants have been categorized as follow:

I. School-to-Work Transition Support

The participants response consistently reveals a perceived absence of structured support during the transition from school to employment for individuals with visual impairments in Slovakia. The participants described a situation where they often had to navigate the job market independently, without the guidance or assistance of structured transition programs. Participants reported having to arrange themselves to the requirement of open labour market, pay for necessary training, and figure out the job application process on their own, which creates additional barriers for them.

> *"Unfortunately, none. There were no programs or support during this transition." (B3)*

> *"No, there was no formal support. I had to arrange my plans to get the employment requirements, particularly assistive technology." (B5)*

> *"I have not received any specific support during this transition. I handled it by myself. But it could have been helpful if there was support during this transition for people with visual impairment. Like trainings that would prepare people with visual impairment for open labour market and so on." (B7)*

Likewise, the interview with staff of Labour, Social affairs, and Family Office further confirmed the lack of school to work transition support not only for people with visual impairment but also for all people with disabilities in Slovakia. The participant has acknowledged how the lack of this support affects the employment of people with disability in open labour market.

> *"There is no nationwide program for transitioning from school to work for people with disabilities. Some regional initiatives and NGO-led projects exist, particularly in smaller cities, but they are not comprehensive." (LSF)*

II. School-to-Work Transition Experience

In exploring participants school to work experience, the participants experiences reflect the difficulties they encountered when transitioning from school to the labor market. Many described

this period as challenging rather than a smooth or positive transition. A notable consistency in their descriptions was the struggle to secure employment after completing their education. Several participants mentioned that they faced long job searches, multiple unsuccessful interviews, and a lack of guidance on where and how to look for work.

> *"It was not easy. After graduating, I struggled to find a job and went through multiple interviews without success." (B3)*

> *"I experience challenge rather than success or positive experience during this transition. For me the challenge was not knowing how and where to look for a job." (B7)*

One of the key challenges highlighted was the lack of practical experience gained during their studies. Some participants noted that they did not have the opportunity to engage in professional internships, either domestically or abroad, which left them feeling unprepared for the workforce. Without hands-on experience, they found it difficult to integrate into the job market and meet employer expectations. The participant from Labour, Social affairs and Family Office also acknowledged the lack of practical trainings for people with visual impairment.

> *"This was one of the difficult periods of my life, because I did not do much practical work during my studies. I did not do any professional internships either at home or abroad. I looked for a job for a long time and then I had to quickly integrate into the work process." (B4)*

> *"Students with disabilities face challenges such as a lack of practical training, limited exposure to real job opportunities, and insufficient tailored career counseling." (LSF)*

Another important aspect of their experiences was the limited access to advanced technological courses and training during their education. Participants noted that the education and training they received did not adequately prepare them with the technical skills required when competing for jobs. Given the increasing reliance on technology in various industries, the lack of technical preparation further hindered their ability to secure employment.

> *"Lack of advanced technological courses and trainings during my studies also contributed to my challenge during this transition." (B3)*

"Mostly the open labour market employers require technological skills, but there is lack of provision of these courses during college or university study." (B7)

4.4.2. Vocational Education and Training

In the context of skill development for employment i.e. vocational education and training is integrated as one of support system for employment of people with visual impairment in this study. The 2 blind and partially sighted unions who participated in this study highlighted, in Slovakia vocational education and training opportunities for people with visual impairments are available through institutions such as, the Slovak Blind and Partially Sighted Union, and the Rehabilitation Centre for Blind and Visually Impaired in Levoča provide training opportunities. But they indicated that these programs are not yet widespread or diversified across Slovakia. In addition, the participant from Labour, Social affairs and Family Office also indicated the institute of Vocational Rehabilitation in Bratislava. The participants emphasized the services provided in these institutions as follow:

"In Slovakia I am aware of the supports provided by Slovak Blind and Partially sighted unions and Rehabilitation Center for visually impaired. The Unions offer: full-scale social rehabilitation, mobility training, computer skills training, self-care training, braille skills training, and assistive technologies training." (BU1)

"The Rehabilitation Centre in Levoča offers training in areas like massage therapy, administrative work, and craftsmanship (e.g., pottery, basket weaving, card making)." (BU2)

"In Slovakia, there are centers such as the Institute of Vocational Rehabilitation in Bratislava that offer counseling and training for people with disabilities." (LSF)

Moreover, the participants highlighted despite the growing demand for diverse skills in the labor market, vocational training centers in Slovakia offer only a limited range of skill development options. Participants noted that many skill trainings do not align with their career interests, leaving them with few relevant opportunities. The lack of variety in training programs restricts people with visual impairments from acquiring the necessary skills for competitive employment. Furthermore, they described that some of the vocational education and training remain theoretical rather than hands-on, which hinders the real-world job readiness.

"Yes, but it was not useful for me because the skills did not align with my career interests." (B3)

"Many of these programs are predominantly theoretical and do not always provide the practical, on-the-job training needed to fully prepare individuals for employment." (LSF)

"Personally, I was not interested to participate in any of the vocational education and training, becasue they do not have diversified skill traning that meets the open labour market demand. So I rather choosed online courses." (B1)

Additionally, the participants perceived the main issue contributing to the inefficiency of vocational education and training programs is the lack of systematic collaboration between educational institutions and vocational training providers. Many participants emphasized the absence of targeted vocational programs within mainstream education and noted that vocational education and training providers do not work closely with schools to ensure a smooth transition from education to employment. This disconnect makes it difficult for students with visual impairments to receive specialized instruction and career guidance that could better prepare them for the workforce. Strengthening partnerships between schools, vocational centers, and employers could help bridge this gap by developing more inclusive, job-oriented training programs that respond to the actual needs of the labor market.

"*The problem is that vocational training programs do not match what the job market needs. Schools do not work closely with these centers, and as a result, we do not get the practical skills or guidance that would help in open labour market." (B1)*

"If schools, vocational training providers, and employers worked together, things would be much better. Right now, everything feels disconnected, and we, as individuals with visual impairment, are left without the proper preparation to enter the workforce." (B2)

"There is some collaboration between educational institutions and vocational training providers, but these partnerships are not widespread or systematic." (LSF)

4.4.3. Reasonable Accommodation and Career Development

A. Reasonable Accommodation

The crucial role of reasonable accommodation in supporting people with visual impairment to effectively participate in Slovakia open labour market was underscored by participants. The interview data indicate that employers are willing to adapt the workplace to meet the specific requirements of their employees with visually impairment. Participants acknowledged that employers were accommodating, they stated that their employers were responsive to their needs and willing to provide necessary tools and software. The participants also noted the importance of accessible physical spaces.

> *"My employer has been accommodating. If I requested what I want for my job, and it is possible and up to their budget they fulfill what I request. For instance, I have requested and got a computer with special software." (B7)*

> *"My recent workplace is well-structured, with several additions of accessibility such as braille tags on doors, handrails on the corridors to follow, simple design of the building." (B6)*

The participants further stressed the impact of effective resonable accomodation on their job performance. They consistently emphasized how essential these accommodations were to perform their jobs effectively. This sense of inclusion not only enhanced their job performance but also contributed to their job satisfaction and well-being.

> *"My job would not be possible without a braille display. As I am developing rules for Slovak braille code, I have to work with braille in digital environment daily. Then there are standard office devices I have to use. I could mention scanner which is very useful for a person who is blind, as we can scan a page and use Optical Recognition Character method to translate the image into a text file." (B6)*

> *"My university has been providing assistive technology and different software that I requested. So, it has really helped me to my effective work progress." (B5)*

B. Career Advancement and Development

In the context of career development and advancement the participants reported the opportunities they experience in their work place. Some of the participants have mentioned the opportunities for

growth, such as engaging in professional internships, research projects, and international programs. They also have indicated the possibility of advancing by publishing academic articles and collaborating internationally. Likewise, others stated how their hard work contributed to their professional development and promotion.

> *"One of the possibilities for further development is completing professional internships, Erasmus programs, research projects, specialized trainings or completing a higher academic degree. Also, Faculty members can also advance their careers by publishing academic articles and participating in international collaborations." (B5)*

> *"Because of my hard working I have gotten opportunities for promotion. I have more possibilities to imply my skills into a career development. Not only within the workplace, but also as an active person in the institutions for blind and partially sighted people. Within this frame I am not stumbling upon any barriers, there is always a possible solution somewhere and I am used to seek for them." (B6)*

4.4.4. Discussion of Theme 2

The school-to-work transition finding of this study disclose lack of provision of structured school to work transition support for people with visual impairment. Participants consistently reported absence and lack of formal programs designed to guide them through this crucial phase. Consequently, they described having to independently manage the complexities of the job market, including identifying employment requirements, financing necessary training, and understanding the details of the job application process. This lack of support is further validated by the staff member of Labour, Social affairs and Family Office, who confirmed the limited and fragmented nature of existing transition initiatives for people with disabilities in Slovakia. The absence of comprehensive, nationwide programs leaves people with visual impairment vulnerable, forcing them to overcome additional barriers without adequate guidance and assistance. In line with this finding Legard et al. (2016) stated that many young people with disabilities do not receive adequate transition support, which is crucial for successful employment outcomes, suggesting that current support mechanisms may be ineffective or insufficient.

The school to work transition experience of participants shed light on the complex and often difficult nature of their actual transition experience. The consistent experience was the struggle to

find job after graduation, often involving prolonged periods of job searching and several unsuccessful interviews. This difficulty was compounded by a perceived lack of practical experience gained during their education, leaving them feeling unprepared for the demands of the workforce. The absence of opportunities for professional internships and work-integrated learning, as highlighted by participants and the Labour, Social Affairs, and Family office representative, directly hindered their ability to meet employer expectations. The findings of the study is supported by Schutz and Carter (2022) who noted that, unfortunately, the pathway from the classroom to the workplace can be difficult for youth with disabilities to navigate successfully. Thus Nolan and Gleeson (2017) suggested, educational institutions must listen to the voices of students with disabilities to develop and refine career-related resources effectively. This involves understanding their perspectives and needs through qualitative studies and interviews. Furthermore, the participants noted limited access to technological courses during their studies, leaving them lacking the necessary skills to meet the technical demand of the open labour market. Opie (2018) supports this concern, noting that students with visual impairments often face barriers in accessing technological courses and resources, which can hinder their skill development. For instance, the lack of effective assistive technologies and inadequate training for both students and educators are significant challenges.

As mentioned by the participants while vocational education and training opportunities exist in Slovakia for people with visual impairments, they remain limited in both accessibility and relevance. Institutions such as the Rehabilitation Centre for the Blind and Visually Impaired and Slovak Blind and Partially Sighted Unions offer essential training in mobility, computer skills, braille, and manual work such as massage therapy and craftmanship. However, these programs were described as neither widespread nor sufficiently diverse to reflect the evolving demands of the open labour market. Correspondingly, Bartram and Cavanagh (2019) reported that the importance of vocational education and training to facilitate the integration of people with visual impairment into the workforce, promoting their independence and self-sufficiency. Structured training programs, such as those provided by specialized institutes, ensure that individuals acquire both basic and specific job-related knowledge, leading to successful integration into the work environment. Whereas, Ferrier and Smith (2010) emphasized that people with disabilities face challenges in accessing and participating in vocational education and training, and it is systems

struggle to meet their needs, leading to inconsistencies in quality and accessibility across different countries.

The prevalent issue of theoretical training over practical application is also another concern of participants where it misaligns with their career aspirations. This aligns with the finding of Fazluz and Mazammel (2017) that some vocational education and training programs remain theory-oriented due to traditional reliance on memorization learning, which emphasizes facts and concepts over practical application. This approach often leads to graduates lacking the necessary hands-on skills for real-world situations. Furthermore, the findings underscore the critical need for stronger collaboration between educational institutions and vocational training providers. The reported disconnect hinders the development of integrated and effective pathways from education to employment. In line with this finding Taryaningsih et al. (2025) emphasized that Collaboration between educational institutions and vocational training providers is essential to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities, facilitating a successful transition from education to employment and ensuring inclusive programs that enhance work skills and readiness in a competitive job market.

The availability of reasonable accommodation reveals as one of the support systems that support the employment of people with visual impairment in Slovakia. These accommodations, ranging from assistive technologies to physical modifications like Braille and handrails, were often described as essential for effective job performance. Participants appreciated when employers responded positively to their needs, suggesting a shift toward more inclusive workplace practices. This finding reflects earlier research, which emphasizes that reasonable accommodations are crucial for employees with visual impairments as they help prevent discrimination, enhance workplace accessibility, and foster a supportive environment. Such adjustments, along with employer empathy, significantly improve employment outcomes and self-confidence for individuals with visual impairments (Limbachia & Mistry, 2024). In addition, Hirschberg and Papadopoulos (2016) noted employer awareness and willingness to implement reasonable accommodations vary significantly due to differing levels of understanding of legal obligations, organizational culture, and the presence of ableism. This suggests a need for more consistent policy enforcement and awareness-raising efforts across sectors to ensure equal access to employment for all people with visual impairments.

In terms of career advancement and professional development, the study participants described a range of positive experiences, including involvement in research projects, international exchanges, and institutional leadership roles. These experiences not only supported their individual growth but also demonstrated that with the right support and opportunities, people with visual impairments can progress meaningfully in their careers. As emphasized by Kulkarni and Lengnick-Hall (2014), career advancement among people with disabilities is closely linked to inclusive organizational cultures that recognize merit and provide equal access to development programs. Moreover, some participants also described how their own initiative and perseverance played a role in their advancement, underscoring the importance of both individual agency and systemic support. This finding aligns with Canadian report by Raaf et al. (2023), which emphasized that people with disabilities who had opportunities to engage in meaningful professional development reported stronger job commitment and career satisfaction.

4.5. Theme 3: Perceived Strength and Weakness of Existing Employment Measures

In the exploration of exsiting employment measures of Slovakia for people with visual impairment, the researcher choosed quota system and shelterd workshop with the criteria of widely used employment measure and mostly known by the participants. Therefore, the strength and weakness of of quota system and sheltered work shops is discussed below.

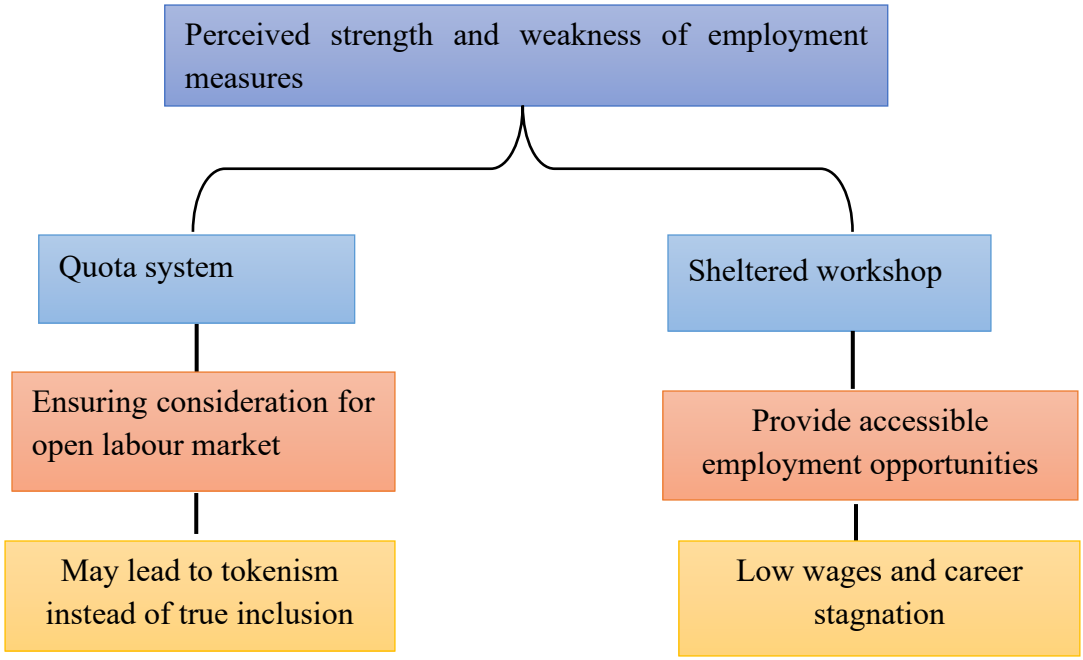


Figure 7: *Perceived strength and weakness of employment measures*

4.5.1. Strength of Employment Measures

I. Quota System

The participants of the study shared their perception about the strength of quota system for employment of people with visual impairment. The participants highlighted the importance of the quota system in increasing the employment opportunities of people with visual impairment in open labour market. They noted that the system ensures that employers consider hiring people with visual impairment rather than overlooking them entirely. Similarly, the blind and partially sighted unions also noted that the quota system serves as a mechanism to raise awareness among Slovakia employers about employment of people with visual impairment.

> *"Without the quota system, most employers would not even think about hiring people with disabilities. At least now, they have to acknowledge us."* (B4)

> *"Quota is one of practical ways that raise awareness of employers about the capability of people with visual impairment. Because, it mandates them to include us in their workforce, it encourages them to recognize our skills and potential." (BU2)*

Correspondingly, the participant from labour, social affairs and family indicated the quota system as one way of encouraging people with visual impairment to seek professional development and vocational training. Knowing that employers of the open labour market have skill and professional requirements, many people with visual impairment feel motivated to improve their skills and knowledge. The interviewed people with visual impairment also highlighted the role of the quota system in improving the employment rate for them. They pointed out that the system provides structured opportunities for people with visual impairment to enter the open labour market, which would otherwise be extremely difficult.

> *"The quota system inspires people with visual impairments to enhance their skills because they understand that employers in the open labor market have specific requirements. This motivates them to pursue vocational training and professional development to meet those demands." (LSF)*

"Finding a job in open labour market is already challenging, but the quota system might be one way to get employed in open labour market for people with visual impairment." (B3)

II. Sheltered Workshop

In the context of sheltered workshop, the participants perceived it as an important path for employment of people with visual impairment. These workplaces promote social inclusion by offering people with visual impairment a sense of purpose and financial independence, even if limited. Participants emphasized that sheltered workshops create opportunities for individuals who may struggle to secure employment in the open labour market due to accessibility and employer hesitancy. Another strength mentioned by the participants is the accessibility of these workplaces. Sheltered workshops are designed to accommodate the diverse needs of employees with visual impairment, incorporating assistive technologies and flexible working arrangements.

"Some of us want to work, but the open labor market is not welcoming. Sheltered workshops give us a chance to earn, be productive, and have a routine rather than being unemployed with no direction." (B2)

"In the sheltered workshop, I do not have to worry about accessibility. The workplace is designed for people like me, with the right technology and support to help us work independently." (B7)

Another significant strength of sheltered workshops that was mentioned by the participant from labour, social affairs and family is their role in facilitating business involvement in disability employment initiatives. Companies that do not meet their legal obligation to hire people with disabilities often collaborate with sheltered workshops as an alternative. The interviewed participant with visual impairment also noted that this partnership allows organizations to fulfill their legal requirements while also supporting the employment of people with disabilities. Participants highlighted that this arrangement benefits both sheltered workshops and companies, as it strengthens financial stability and promotes disability inclusion in the labor market.

"Some companies do not hire people with disabilities directly, but they work with sheltered workshops to meet the quota. It helps the employees with disability keep their jobs and gives businesses a way to contribute." (LSF)

"I know some employers that prefer working with sheltered workshops rather than hiring people with disabilities directly. It is not perfect, but at least it creates some employment opportunities for us." (B6)

4.5.2. Weakness of Employment Measures

I. Quota System

Despite its strengths, participants identified perceived weaknesses in the quota system that limit its effectiveness. The blind and partially sighted unions emphasized that, even though the state has mandated quota system to employers to employ 3.2% of people with disability, but it has also alternatives. The alternatives are the employer can fulfil this obligation by paying a fee of 0.9 times the total price of the labour costs, or purchasing goods from sheltered workshops, or by combining these methods. However, the unions stressed that these fines are not expensive enough to act as a real deterrent. As a result, many employers choose to pay the fine rather than go through the effort of integrating people with disabilities into their workforce.

"The fact that employers can fulfill the quota by paying a levy or purchasing goods instead of hiring people with disabilities makes the system less effective. Many companies prefer these alternatives because they are easier and require less commitment. The fines are not high enough to push employers to truly consider integrating people with disabilities into their workforce, so they take the simplest route instead." (BU1, BU2)

Moreover, a key issue raised by interviewed people with visual impairment was that many employers view the system as a bureaucratic obligation rather than a genuine effort to integrate people with visual impairment into the workforce. This weakness of the employment measure was emphasized on how the quota system reinforce discrimination and exclusion by placing people with visual impairment in more disadvantageous position. They stressed that employers may simply hire people with visual impairment to meet the quota without providing meaningful employment or opportunities for career advancement.

"What worries me about the quota system is that I fear employers might just hire someone like me to meet the numbers, without really caring about our skills or career. It seems like it could easily turn into just ticking boxes, rather than genuine inclusion." (B2)

"I have this feeling that some employers might see the quota as a way to avoid penalties, instead of giving us real opportunities. It makes me wonder if they would focus more on compliance than on our actual development. It feels like it could lead to minimum effort, where we are just there to fill a space." (B5)

II. Sheltered Workshop

Even though Slovakia widely uses sheltered workshop, the participants reported the low opportunities of transiting to open labour market. They indicated that the shelter workshops feel like segregation, because of the long stay of majority number of employee with disability without transiting to open labour market. Furthermore, the participant from Labour, Social affairs and Family Office admitted that the low experience of transition of people with visual impairment from shelter workshops to open labour market, because of lack of collaboration between shelter workshops and open labour market employers.

"They talk about sheltered workshops as a way to get experience, but where does that experience lead? I have been there for 2 years, and nobody was talking about moving on. It seems like there is no bridge to the open market. We are just stuck. It feels like we are forgotten." (B7)

"Look, the reality is, we are not seeing enough people with visual impairment move from sheltered workshops into open labour market jobs. And a big part of that is, there is just not enough communication, not enough partnerships, between the workshops and employers in the open market. We need businesses to actively engage, to offer placements, to understand the potential of these workers. Right now, it is just not happening enough." (LSF)

Moreover, Participants expressed concerns about career growth in sheltered workshops. Many felt that once employed in these settings, they had little to no opportunity for promotion or skill enhancement. This lack of career progression left them feeling stagnant, with few options to advance professionally. Another major concern was the low salaries in sheltered workshops, which made achieving financial independence difficult. Likewise, participants highlighted that while these workplaces provided employment security, the wages were often insufficient to cover their basic living expenses, leading to continued reliance on family or government support.

"I have a friend who has been working in a sheltered workshop for over five years, doing the same job without any chance for promotion or skill development. It feels like there is no clear path for growth or advancement." (B2)

"When I was working in a sheltered workshop, my salary was so low that it could not cover my basic expenses. I had to rely on my family for financial support just to get by." (B7)

4.5.3. Discussion of Theme 3: Perceived Strength and Weakness of Existing Employment Measures

The quota system emerged as a widely recognized mechanism that helps facilitate access to employment opportunities for people with visual impairments in Slovakia. Rather than being overlooked, people with visual impairments are brought into the consideration of employers due to the legal obligations imposed by this measure. This system is seen as more than a hiring mandate it plays a role in shifting employer attitudes and raising awareness about the potential of workers with visual impairments. Similar findings have been reported by Bell and Waddington (2016), who noted that well-enforced quota policies can foster a sense of institutional responsibility and inclusivity in hiring practices. In addition, although the overall employment status of people with disabilities in Slovakia is not highly favorable, there have been slight improvements in recent years. The quota system, along with other targeted measures, has contributed to these positive changes by creating more job opportunities for people with disabilities (Jana & Eva, 2019). Beyond its role in improving employer engagement, the quota system also appears to encourage individuals with visual impairments to pursue skill development and vocational preparation. The awareness that open labour market positions come with expectations around competencies and qualifications drives many to seek training and build capacity. This motivational effect reflects insights from Kulkarni and Lengnick-Hall (2011), who argued that structural supports can positively influence career motivation and planning among jobseekers with disabilities.

Sheltered workshops were also described as a vital alternative for people with visual impairment who face greater difficulty securing employment in mainstream settings. These spaces not only provide work but also offer structure, routine, and a sense of social inclusion elements often missing when employment opportunities are scarce. Participants appreciated the provided accessibility features in such settings, including assistive technologies and adapted physical environments, which enable greater independence and productivity. May-simera (2018) similarly

noted that sheltered workshops, while sometimes contested, continue to serve as important spaces for economic and social participation for people with disability. A further benefit of these workshops lies in their established partnerships with employers that seek to fulfill disability employment obligations indirectly. Companies that are unable or unwilling to directly hire workers with disabilities often collaborate with these organizations, offering financial support or outsourcing tasks. While this employment measure may not represent full workplace integration, it contributes to job creation and financial sustainability for sheltered employment schemes. As noted by Galer (2014) such partnerships with employers who prefer to buy goods and services from sheltered workshops can provide a dual benefit: it allows these employers to fulfill corporate social responsibility goals while also supporting the economic integration of individuals with disabilities. This collaboration can help sheltered workshops sustain operations and provide meaningful work opportunities, even if direct employment is not feasible.

Although the quota system and sheltered workshops are widely used employment measures in Slovakia, participants highlighted notable limitations that hinder their effectiveness in promoting meaningful and sustainable employment for people with visual impairments. One of the main criticisms raised was the presence of alternative compliance options within the quota system. While designed to increase employment rates among people with disabilities, the ability for employers to fulfill their obligations by paying a levy or outsourcing to sheltered workshops appears to weak the intent of the policy. This concern aligns with article by Huang (2023) in China, which suggests that when quota systems are not strictly enforced or financially disincentivized, they often lead to symbolic compliance rather than genuine inclusion. Employers may be more inclined to opt for the least disruptive option, thereby bypassing the actual hiring of individuals with disabilities. On the same token, Krekó and Telegdy (2025) noted that, Some employers might find it more straightforward to pay the levy rather than invest time and resources into understanding and implementing the necessary accommodations and support systems for employees with disabilities. Furthermore, the perception that some employers treat the quota as a bureaucratic requirement rather than a strategy for workforce diversification reinforces the risk of discrimination. This finding directly aligns with Huang (2023), stated there is a risk that the quota system might reinforce discrimination if not properly managed, as employers might hire people with disabilities just to meet legal requirements without genuine inclusion.

The findings also pointed to weakness of sheltered workshop employment measure. Despite being more accessible and disability-focused, these settings were often perceived as reinforcing segregation rather than serving as a steppingstone into the open labour market. This reflects broader critiques in the literature, where Holubová et al. (2024) in the context of widespread sheltered employment, there is no similar support for the transition to the open labour market, to prevent systematic people with disability segregation in Slovakia. This is due to a weakness in the general labour market policy set-up and a predominant focus on job subsidies for firms within the framework of active labour market policies. Moreover, a lack of structured transition pathways from sheltered settings to open labour market employment was noted as a significant weakness. The absence of collaboration between workshops and mainstream employer's limits individuals' chances to progress beyond entry-level or repetitive roles. In many cases, sheltered workshops risk becoming permanent destinations rather than transitional support systems. This finding is also supported by Holubová et al. (2024), some people with disability workers have remained at the same sheltered workplace for over 10 years, which effectively means that a sheltered workplace is a permanent one, without a transition option. Furthermore, the current study reveals that the issue of low wages in these settings which compounds economic insecurity, making it difficult for workers to achieve independence. A study by Avellone et al. (2023) also revealed many sheltered workshops pay below the federal minimum wage in United States. This provision allows employers to pay less than minimum wage to individuals whose work capacity is impaired by a disability.

4.6. Theme 4: Employment Challenges of People with Visual Impairment

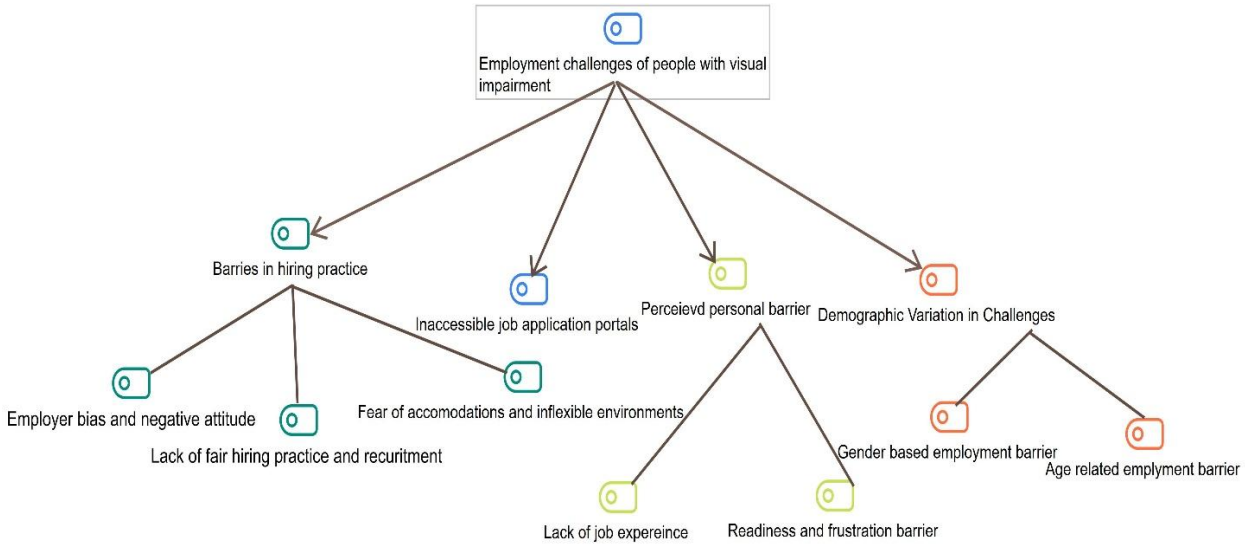


Figure 8: *Employment challenges of people with visual impairment*

4.6.1. Employment Barrier in Hiring Process

In the context of employment barrier in hiring practices, employer bias and negative attitude, lack of fair hiring practice, recruitment discrimination, and fears related to accommodation and inflexible work environments are identified as a barrier.

I. Employers Bias and Negative Attitude

The participants identified employer bias as one of the most prevalent challenges in securing employment, revealing a systematic barrier to fair evaluation. Many reported that hiring managers often assumed incompetence based only on their visual impairment, without evaluating their actual skills or qualifications. The participants indicated that, this bias was sometimes compounded by misconceptions linking visual impairment with cognitive limitations, leading to automatic disqualification from job opportunities. Therefore, the participants stressed that this initial prejudgment creates a fundamental obstacle, as it prevents candidate with visual impairment from having their qualifications considered on merit.

> *"Some of them think that people with visual impairment have mental functioning problems, which is very sad. Because of this, many employers were hesitant to employ me because I am a person with visual impairment." (B3)*

"Employers assume that people with visual impairments cannot perform certain jobs without fully understanding their capabilities. They often focus on what a person cannot do rather than what they can do." (B5)

II. Lack of Fair Hiring Practices and Recruitment Discrimination

In the context of hiring practice and recruitment discrimination the participants reveal a troubling pattern where candidates with visual impairments, who successfully passed initial application screening, faced sudden and unexplained rejection upon disability disclosure during interview stages. This clear difference between initial positive evaluations and later rejections shows a systematic problem with unfair hiring practices and obvious recruitment discrimination. Participants described how employers, who had positively evaluated their qualifications on paper, underwent a complete reversal in attitude once their visual impairment became apparent.

"I applied online twice and successfully passed the first stage of recruitment. As a result, I was invited for an interview, which was also conducted online. During the interview, the employer seemed genuinely impressed with my CV and even praised my qualifications. However, when I mentioned my visual impairment while responding to one of his questions, his character completely changed. He suddenly seemed uninterested and shocked, and from that point on, it was clear that I was no longer a serious candidate for the position." (B1)

"I have applied for multiple jobs but employers are not interested once they know I am a person with visual impairment." (B7)

Additionally, the participants have indicated negative past experience of the employer with employee with visual impairment as a main root cause. The participant from labour, social affairs and family acknowledged the employer's generalization about these isolated incidents, leading to a total rejection of all individuals with similar disabilities. They further indicated how this practice not only unfairly penalizes qualified candidates but also spreads the cycle of exclusion, where the past failure is used to justify present discrimination.

"I applied for one job in Bratislava and passed the first stage of recruitment. Then during the interview, the employer told me that he is no longer interested to employ people with disability. Because he mentioned that the person he employed lacked a lot of skills that are

basic for the job. So, after that he is not interested to employ any person with disability." (B1)

"Many employers still base their hiring decisions on generalized assumptions and past experience about what individuals with disabilities cannot do. This bias significantly hinders employment opportunities despite overall improvements in policy." (LSF)

III. Fear of Accommodation and Inflexible Environments

Another barrier which was indicated by the participants is employers' misconception about workplace accommodation. Participants consistently reported that employer hesitancy to hire people with visual impairments is also stemmed largely from misconception about workplace adjustments. Many employers assumed that hiring a person with visual impairment would require extensive modifications, specialized equipment, or significant disruption to the workflow. This led to automatic rejections or reluctance to proceed with recruitment, even when accommodations were minimal or unnecessary. Participants expressed frustration that employers frequently made assumptions about their needs rather than engaging in discussion to understand practical and cost-effective solutions.

"*From my personal experience, there is not much willingness to employ people with health or disabilities in Slovakia. Employers are afraid that they will have to make architectural adjustments to the environment, frequent health complications due to which the employee will not be able to perform their work, or that they will not be able to adapt to the work pace and will not be able to handle the work." (B4)*

In addition, many participants noted that employers wrongly assumed they would need expensive or disruptive workplace modifications, when in reality, most adjustments were minor or already available within the company's existing resources.

"Employers think that hiring someone with a visual impairment means making expensive changes to the workplace, but in reality, most of us only need small adjustments things that are already available in many offices." (B5)

4.6.2. Inaccessible Job Application Portals

In the exploration of challenges where people with visual impairment face to secure and maintain employment, inaccessible job application portals is indicated by the participants. The participants

noted barriers when navigating online job application portals, highlighting systematic issues in digital accessibility that disproportionately affect people with visual impairment. Some participants explained many employers application systems are designed without adequate consideration for assistive technologies, leading to fundamental accessibility failures that hinder the completion of job applications. Critical functions such as file uploads, form fields, and navigation menus are often improperly labeled or structured, rendering them incompatible with screen readers and other assistive devices. This oversight not only violates international accessibility standards but also effectively excludes qualified candidates with visual impairment from the recruitment process.

> *"I have struggled with online job application portals a lot; some of them are very complicated, and the deadline passes while I was trying to figure out the complicated portal. For example, the system would ask me to click the blue button or describe images without alt text how am I supposed to do that?" (B7)*

Additionally, some participants highlighted limited experience with online job application portals contributed to the challenges they face during the application process. They explained navigating complex and often inaccessible digital platforms without prior familiarity intensified difficulties, leading to increased frustration and, in some cases, prolonged periods of unemployment.

> *"Inaccessible job application portals, due to both lack of experience with the portals and the inaccessible nature of the portals themselves for people with visual impairment, led to me being unemployed for a year." (B2)*

4.6.3. Perceived Personal Barriers

In the exploration of employment challenges of people with visual impairment the theme of perceived personal barriers emerged. While having an interview with participants of people with visual impairment has emphasized lack of job experience and readiness and frustration barriers as personal barriers which is discussed below.

I. Lack of Job experience

Participants identified a lack of work experience and limited marketable skills as personal barriers to gaining employment. Many recalled receiving contradictory messages during their teenage and young adult years, they were encouraged to pursue any career they desired but were given little to

no practical support on how to achieve those ambitions. Most were advised to focus only on their academic studies rather than seeking part-time work during high school and university, resulting in missed opportunities to build early work experience. Consequently, entering the labor market after graduation was a major challenge, and prolonged periods of unemployment meant that many participants had less experience than typically expected for their age.

> *"During school, they told me I could be anything I wanted, but no one showed me how to get there. I focused on my studies as advised, but when I graduated, I had no work experience, and employers wanted more than just a degree." (B1)*

> *"I was always told to prioritize my education, so I did not take on part-time jobs. After college, I realized I lacked the experience employers were looking for, and it took me over a year to find a job." (B2)*

II. Readiness and Frustration Barrier

Participants reported that employer rejection based on their visual impairments led to profound feelings of incompetence and self-doubt. They noted that despite possessing the necessary qualifications and skills, being judged only on their impairment resulted in frustration and diminished self-esteem. The participants stressed that this form of discrimination not only hindered their employment opportunities, but also negatively impacted their confidence in their professional abilities.

> *"The constant rejection from potential employers due to my visual impairment was profoundly demoralizing. Each 'no' diminished my self-confidence, leading me to question my own worth and competence. It felt as though my qualifications and skills were invisible, overshadowed by my disability. This persistent cycle of rejection raised deep frustration, making me wonder if there was something wrong with me. The experience was not just discouraging; it was emotionally exhausting, leaving me to grapple with feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt." (B7)*

In terms of readiness, participants expressed concern about their ability to perform specific job functions due to their visual impairments. The lack of practical guidance during their education left them uncertain about handling tasks that traditionally rely heavily on sight. They emphasize

that this uncertainty often led to anxiety about entering workforce and fulfilling job responsibilities effectively.

> *"During my studies, I worried about how I would handle visual tasks, such as teaching students to read and write." (B5)*

4.6.4. Demographic Variation in Employment Challenge

In the context of demographic variations in employment challenges, participants highlighted that employment challenges for people with visual impairment are not experienced uniformly but are influenced by demographic factor such as gender. Participants noted that women with visual impairment were frequently described as facing greater disadvantages in the labour market compared to men. This includes less job opportunities, employer assumption about competence due to spending more time in caretaking responsibilities, and double discrimination because of being a woman and having disability. Blind and partially sighted unions representatives also acknowledged that in Slovakia, men with visual impairments tend to have higher employment rates compared to women, similar to trends observed in other countries.

> *"As far as I know men with visual impairment has higher employment status than women with visual impairment. I feel like the disability plus being a woman is also one factor for this variation". (B7)*

> *"It is obvious, there is a noticeable difference in employment rates between men and women with visual impairments. More men seem to be employed, while women often struggle to find the same opportunities. This is one of the questions that I have been asking myself." (BU2)*

The participants further indicated age as a factor influencing employment opportunities. Younger individuals with visual impairments were seen as having more access to emerging job sectors, particularly those involving technology and remote work, which offer greater flexibility and accommodation options. However, the interviewed participant from labour, social affairs, and family reported that most young people with disability enroll to school lately, thus most of young people with disability stay in education till the age of 24. Therefore, the participant from the office indicated that most young people with disability will not have early exposure for employment like their age peers without disability. Moreover, the participants emphasized that older individuals,

especially those who acquired visual impairments later in life, were reported to face difficulties in career transitions and adapting to new work environments.

> *"In today's digitally advanced world, younger people with visual impairments often have an advantage because they grow up using assistive technologies, while older individuals may struggle to adapt to these tools. For those who lost sight later in life, employment can be especially challenging. They have to start from scratch learning Braille, mobility skills, and assistive technology, while younger individuals are already familiar with these tools." (B1)*

> *"One of the challenges is late school enrolment of people with disability, which adversely affects their early exposure to employment in young age as they will be still in school even up to age 24." (LSF)*

> *"Those who acquired visual impairment later in life, must learn entirely new skills before they can compete for jobs. For instance, in Slovakia, they learn these skills in Rehabilitation center for the visually impaired, Levoča." (B3)*

4.6.5. Discussion of Theme 4: Employment Challenges of People with Visual Impairment

Structural and attitudinal barrier revealed persistently that hinder people with visual impairments from accessing equitable employment opportunities in Slovakia. Employer bias and negative attitudes emerged as critical challenges, consistent with prior research that has documented the pervasive stigma surrounding disability in workplace contexts. Studies such as Castel (2024) affirm that indeed, across both academic and grey literature, it is employer attitudes that have most consistently emerged as one of the biggest perceived barriers to employment for people with visual impairment. In the current study the participants described how such biases translated into assumptions about incompetence, often linked to mistakenly to cognitive limitations, which ultimately undermined their chance of being assessed on merit.

Moreover, the findings point to a lack of fair hiring practices, particularly the sudden shifts in employer attitudes once disability is disclosed during interviews. This phenomenon, often described as disability disclosure backlash, has been reported in several contexts (Santuzzi et al., 2014). It reflects an underlying systemic issue where disability disclosure is perceived not as

neutral information, but as a liability, regardless of an applicant's credentials. Participants' experiences indicate that disability remains a significant factor in employment decisions, even in cases where initial qualifications were positively acknowledged. This reinforces Grech and Soldatic's (2016) assertion that despite formal anti-discrimination policies, informal practices continue to shape unequal outcomes for people with disabilities.

Additionally, concerns related to reasonable accommodation were revealed as another major barrier in hiring decisions. Employers' misconceptions about the cost and complexity of accommodations are not unique to the Slovakian context. According to The Disabled people's organization Coalition (2023), employers often overestimate the burden of accommodations, despite evidence showing that most are low-cost or require minimal adjustments. The current study aligns with this literature, indicating that assumptions about high expense and disruption lead to hesitance or rejection at the recruitment stage. Such misconceptions not only reflect a lack of awareness but also suggest limited employer engagement with existing policy frameworks that support inclusive hiring.

Compounding these issues is the generalization of past negative experiences by employers, which creates a biased narrative against hiring people with visual impairments. In support of this a review by Castel (2024) indicates that employers often generalize past negative experiences, leading to biased narratives against hiring people with visual impairments. This bias stems from concerns about employee performance and interactions with customers and colleagues, impacting overall attitudes towards candidates with visual impairment. As evidenced in the current study findings, these generalized assumptions spread exclusion and diminish trust in the potential of individuals with visual impairments to perform effectively in diverse roles.

Inaccessible job application portals for people with visual impairment, particularly during online application process is one of the employment barriers. The findings underscore that many online job application portals are not designed to be compatible with assistive technologies such as screen readers or keyboard navigation. A study involving blind screen reader users attempting to complete online job applications from Fortune 500 companies found that only 55.6% of attempts were successful. Critical issues were present in 76.7% of the websites, preventing at least one tester from completing the application. This highlights the widespread accessibility problems in job application portals (Reuschel et al., 2023). Lack of option formats for images where a user has to

identify the images that contain certain objects, such as animals, trees, or street signs is also another barrier which was revealed in the current study. This finding is consistent with a review by Shethia and Techatassanasoontorn (2019) that the lack of alt-text for images and the use of visual CAPTCHAs are common problems that hinder the ability of screen readers to convey necessary information to users with visual impairment. Moreover, participants' experiences reflect broader digital divides within the disability community. Limited familiarity with online application systems, especially when coupled with inaccessible design, intensifies exclusion from the labor market. Simon-Liedtke et al. (2024) supports this finding who argued that there is often insufficient training provided to individuals with visual impairment on how to use assistive technologies and online systems, which exacerbates their unfamiliarity and lack of confidence.

The study highlighted that individuals with visual impairments often face internal or personal challenges that intersect with external systemic barriers, ultimately affecting their employment outcomes. One of the central issues was a lack of work experience, which participants linked to insufficient early vocational exposure and unclear career preparation during formative years. While encouragement toward academic success was common, many were not guided toward part-time or volunteer opportunities that could have enhanced their employability. This gap aligns with suggestion by Kelly (2019) early and consistent exposure to jobs, work ethics, and work duties is critical for students who are visually impaired to achieve successful outcomes in employment and other areas of their adult lives. Likewise, the concern around practical preparedness was also compounded by participants' concerns about their ability to manage work-related visual tasks, reflecting a broader uncertainty regarding workplace expectations. This perception of unpreparedness is supported by Schutz et al. (2023), who argue that people with disabilities often internalize doubts about their employability when they have not had access to structured, skill-building experiences that instill confidence and practical competencies.

Furthermore, repeated rejections during the job search process due to disability-related bias led many participants to experience a decline in self-esteem and heightened emotional distress. This frustration barrier is also highlighted by Jung et al. (2022) that individuals with disabilities often face significant barriers and discrimination in the job market, which can negatively impact their self-esteem. For instance, those who consistently experience low acceptance of their disability are

more likely to have low self-esteem. Similarly, Lee et al. (2022) noted that the psychological impact of these rejections includes not only a decline in self-esteem but also increased emotional distress. The experience of discrimination and the resulting stress can lead to a deterioration in mental health, including higher levels of depression and anxiety.

The study findings indicate that employment challenges among people with visual impairment are shaped by intersecting demographic factors, particularly gender and age. Female participants consistently reported facing more employment barriers compared to their male counterparts, pointing to a pattern of double discrimination where gender and disability intersect to compound disadvantage. This is consistent with prior research, which highlights that women with disabilities often experience heightened marginalization in the labor market due to prevailing gender stereotypes, assumptions about caregiving responsibilities, and limited access to job opportunities (Brooks, 2021; Carrasco, 2024). Studies from various contexts, including Slovakia, confirm that employment rates among men with visual impairments are generally higher than those among women, reflecting a broader trend of gender disparity in employment outcomes (WHO & World Bank, 2011).

In addition to gender, age emerged as a significant factor influencing employment opportunities. The participants observed that younger people with visual impairments are more likely to access flexible and tech-oriented job sectors, particularly due to their early exposure to assistive technologies and adaptive digital environments. However, the study also reveal that delayed school enrolment and prolonged education among young people with disabilities in Slovakia limits their early work experience, which may delay their entry into the labor market. Conversely, older individuals, especially those who acquired visual impairment later in life, were reported to face more pronounced employment difficulties. These challenges include the need to learn new skills such as Braille, orientation and mobility techniques, and the use of assistive technology skills that are often introduced through structured rehabilitation programs. Transitioning to new work environments or careers later in life can be more complex due to limited familiarity with such tools, as well as reduced flexibility in adapting to new roles or retraining (Pagán, 2013).

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the employment opportunities and challenges of people with visual impairments in Slovakia, focusing on the individual experiences of employees with visual impairment and the perspectives of institutional stakeholders. Through semi-structured interviews, the study provided in-depth insights into how systemic barriers, institutional practices, and individual identity factors converge to influence the labor market inclusion of people with visual impairments.

The findings revealed that while employment opportunities do exist for people with visual impairments in Slovakia, they remain limited and unequally distributed. Participants reported that job opportunities were most often secured through personal networks rather than through open recruitment processes, highlighting the limited accessibility and inclusivity of mainstream hiring platforms. Inaccessible digital application portals, employer misconceptions about visual impairment, and fears around workplace accommodations were repeatedly mentioned as significant barriers. These reflect how attitudinal, technological, and structural barriers continue to marginalize this population, in alignment with the principles of the Social Model of Disability.

The study also identified the transition from school to employment represents a particularly weak link in the employment pathway for people with visual impairments. Most participants reported a lack of formal transition support, including access to internships, mentorship, and career counseling during or after their education. This lack of early exposure to the job market often delayed employment, created uncertainty, and forced individuals to navigate the workforce independently. Without structured guidance, many struggled to gain the practical experience needed to secure or retain meaningful employment.

Vocational training and career development were additional areas of concern. While programs do exist, they are often outdated, overly theoretical, or misaligned with labor market demands. Participants emphasized a lack of diversity in training options and noted that even when training was available, it often did not lead to meaningful employment. Career advancement was limited, particularly in sheltered workshops, which despite offering some security provided little opportunity for progression into open labor markets.

The employment measures in place such as quota employment schemes, and sheltered workshops offered mixed outcomes. Although quota systems provide an entry point into employment, the availability of alternative methods to fulfill the quota (e.g., financial penalties or outsourcing to sheltered workshops) often discourages direct hiring. Similarly, while sheltered workshops provide a secure space for employment, they lack pathways for transition to open labor markets and often fail to offer career growth.

A significant contribution of this research is its attention to intersectionality. The study found that employment challenges are not experienced uniformly among people with visual impairment but are influenced by additional demographic factors such as gender and age. Women with visual impairments faced compounded disadvantages experiencing not only disability-related discrimination but also gender biases. Younger individuals, though generally more familiar with assistive technologies, often lacked practical job experience, while older participants who acquired visual impairments later in life faced the dual burden of relearning skills and adapting to new technologies.

Personal-level barriers also emerged as important factors. Many participants expressed self-doubt, anxiety, and frustration arising from repeated experiences of rejection or exclusion based on their disability. A lack of job-readiness, often tied to inadequate training or earlier life guidance, compounded these feelings. Despite possessing the necessary qualifications, individuals with visual impairments were frequently perceived through a lens of incapacity, reinforcing internalized stigma and limiting their confidence and motivation in pursuing opportunities.

This thesis has demonstrated that while Slovakia has taken important steps towards disability inclusion in employment, much remains to be done to translate policy commitments into effective, inclusive practices. The research findings validate the need for a shift in both societal and institutional approaches from focusing on disability as an individual limitation, to addressing the societal structures that disable people. By adopting a dual framework of the Social Model of Disability and Intersectionality Theory, this study offers a deeper, more detailed understanding of employment inequalities, as well as practical pathways for reform.

In conclusion, achieving inclusive employment for people with visual impairments in Slovakia will require concerted efforts at multiple levels. This includes not only revising policy frameworks and improving institutional supports, but also addressing societal attitudes and employer practices.

More inclusive and accessible recruitment procedures, better alignment between training programs and labor market needs, and stronger enforcement of workplace accommodation policies are all necessary to ensure that people with visual impairments can participate fully and equally in the workforce. This study also contributes meaningful, context-specific insights that can inform inclusive employment strategies not only in Slovakia but in other similar socio-economic settings.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, a series of targeted recommendations are proposed to improve the employment outcomes of people with visual impairments in Slovakia. These recommendations call for the coordinated efforts of policymakers, employers, educational institutions, training providers, and disability organizations, reflecting the need for a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder approach.

- School-to-work transition support should be enhanced by developing and implementing structured, nationwide programs that assist students with visual impairments in moving from education to employment. This includes mentorship, job shadowing, career guidance, and paid internships tailored to the needs of young people with disabilities. Ministry of Education and Ministry Labour, in collaboration with vocational schools, disability NGOs, and private employers, should lead these initiatives to ensure sustainable implementation.
- Reform vocational and educational training systems: Training providers, in partnership with employers and labour authorities, should expand and diversify vocational programs to reflect evolving market demands particularly in digital, remote, and service-oriented sectors. Emphasis should be placed on practical, hands-on training, ensuring that individuals with visual impairments are equipped with marketable skills that facilitate meaningful employment.
- Career development and advancement opportunities should be actively promoted: employers, supported by labour, social affair and family office and business associations, should implement inclusive promotion pathways and performance evaluation systems that recognize diverse needs. By providing leadership training and accessible career progression plans, employers can ensure that employees with visual impairments are not limited to entry-level roles.
- Workplace accommodation practices should be strengthened: through better enforcement of existing disability legislation and the provision of clear, practical guidelines. Labour offices

and social affairs ministries can incentivize employers with financial support and awareness campaigns, clarifying that many accommodations are low-cost and highly effective.

- Digital recruitment and job application platforms should be made accessible: public and private employment services should be required to comply with international accessibility standards, ensuring features such as screen reader compatibility, accessible verification methods, and clear navigation. This effort should involve IT developers, platform owners, and government regulators.
- It is essential to revise and strengthen the quota system to promote the direct hiring of people with disabilities. Policymakers should reduce reliance on financial alternatives and improve monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance. More meaningful penalties for non-compliance could shift employer behavior and enhance inclusion efforts.
- Additionally, inclusive employer practices should be fostered through training and awareness initiatives targeting hiring managers and leadership teams. Disability NGOs and employer federations should collaborate on campaigns that challenge stereotypes, promote success stories, and offer practical tools for inclusive recruitment and integration.
- Partnerships between key stakeholders should also be encouraged: cross-sectoral collaboration among government bodies, NGOs, educational institutions, and the private sector can help align training with labor needs, share best practices, and strengthen support mechanisms for people with visual impairments in the workforce.
- Moreover, there is a pressing need to provide personalized employment support services, such as job coaching, mentorship, and individualized career planning. Labour offices and disability service providers can implement these supports to enhance job retention, improve employee confidence, and ensure sustainable inclusion.
- To address disparities, targeted interventions must respond to the specific challenges faced by women and older adults with visual impairments. This includes developing gender-sensitive training, promoting work-life balance, and offering re-skilling programs for those who acquire a disability later in life. Equality bodies and social service agencies should integrate these concerns into mainstream policy design.
- Support should also be extended to individuals interested in self-employment and entrepreneurship. Government economic departments and financial institutions can offer

microgrants, advisory services, and mentorship opportunities, encouraging innovation and financial independence for people with visual impairments.

- Finally, ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and research should be institutionalized to assess the effectiveness of employment programs. Research institutions, in collaboration with ministries and independent evaluators, should regularly review program outcomes to inform policy and ensure accountability.
- Future research should compare the employment opportunities and challenges of people with visual impairment with different countries, compare the expereince of full time and part-time employee with visual impairment.

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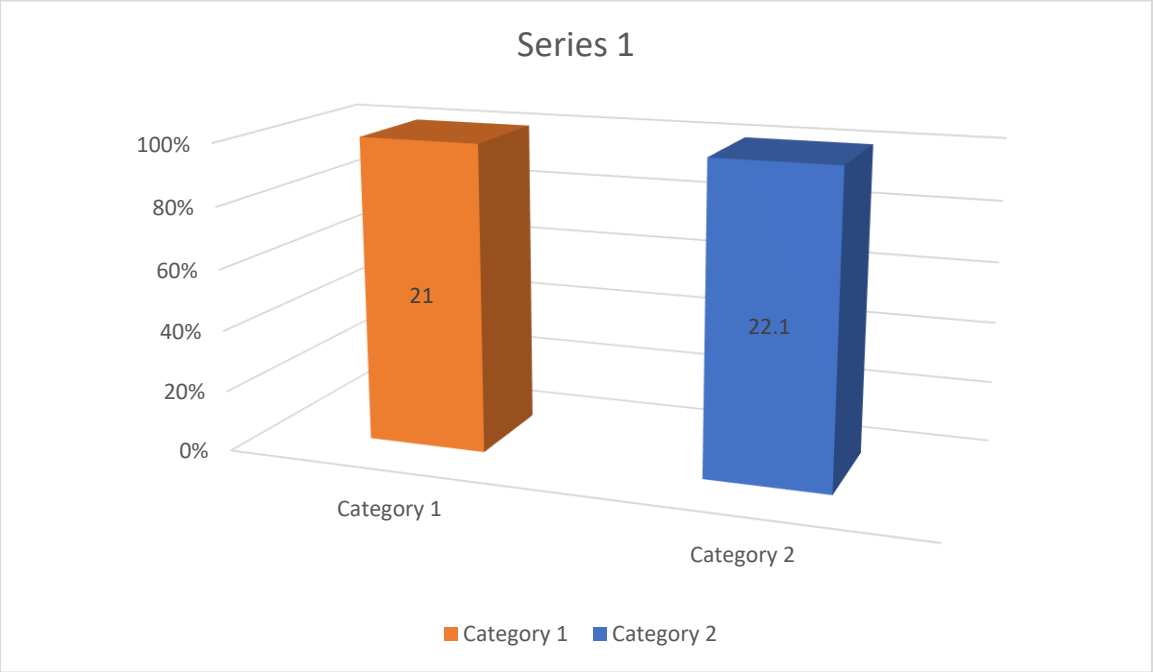
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APPENDIX I: Employment Gap Between Persons with and without Disabilities



The employment gap between persons with and without disabilities, aged 20-64, 2022 and 2023, expressed in percentage points (pp)

Source: EU-SILC 2022 and 2023, Eurostat. Available at

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/hlth_dlm200__custom_12880527/default/bar?lang=en

APPENDIX II: Informed Consent Form

Title of the study

Employment Opportunities and Challenges for People with Visual Impairments in Slovakia

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in an interview for my research project. The following information outlines how the data collected will be handled to ensure ethical standards and protect your rights:

- You will be provided with full information about the purpose of the study before the interview begins.
- Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time, even after the interview has been completed, without providing a reason.
- The interview will be recorded to assist in accurately documenting what is said. This recording will only be used for the purpose of this research.
- All collected data will be treated confidentially. It will be securely stored and will not be accessible to unauthorized individuals.
- In the analysis and reporting of results, all identifying information will be removed or altered to protect your anonymity.
- Upon completion of the research project, all recordings and collected data will be destroyed.
- The data collected will be used solely for this study and will not be shared with others or used for other purposes.

You also have the right to decline to answer any specific question during the interview or to terminate the interview at any point without any consequences.

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation or the study, you are welcome to contact me or my supervisor at the email addresses provided below.

Thank you for your time and valuable contribution to this research.

Student: Yetnayet Woldu Kinfe, yekinfe@stud.mruni.eu

Supervisor: Angela Almasiova, angela.almasiova@ku.sk

APPENDIX III: Non-Plagiarism Declaration

I hereby declare that the Master Thesis titled **"Employment Opportunities and Challenges for People with Visual Impairments in Slovakia"** is my own original work.

I confirm that:

- I have properly cited and referenced all ideas, words, or works of other authors that I have used, whether taken verbatim or in substance.
- I have not engaged in any form of plagiarism, including copying text from electronic sources such as the internet without appropriate citation.
- I have not submitted any work written by another person or previously submitted in another program.
- I understand that unacknowledged use of others' work, improper citation, and unauthorized copying from other students constitute plagiarism and intentional deception.
- I am fully aware that plagiarism, whether intentional or unintentional, is a serious violation that may result in the annulment of my thesis and possible exclusion from the ESWOCHY Consortium Universities.
- I have been informed that plagiarism detection software may be used to review my thesis and I accept this procedure as part of the academic integrity requirements.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that I have complied with all academic integrity guidelines regarding the use of sources and the originality of my work.

Date:

Student Name: Yetnayet Woldu Kinfe

Signature: 

APPENDIX IV: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR EMPLOYED PEOPLE WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the employment opportunities and challenges of people with visual impairment. Your honest responses to the interview questions are crucial for the success of this research. Please be assured that all your answers will be kept strictly confidential. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation!

Background of the participants

A. Age:
B. Sex:
C. Marital status:
D. Highest level of education you achieved:
E. Years of Work Experience:
F. Industry of Employment:
G. Are you currently employed full-time or part-time:

Interview Questions for Employed People with visual impairment

Section 1: Employment Opportunity

1. Current employment
   - Can you describe your current job and your role within the organization?
   - How long have you been employed in your current position?
2. Job Search and Hiring Process
   - How did you find your current job?
   - What was your experience with the hiring process? Were there any specific challenges you faced?
3. Workplace Environment
   - How would you describe the inclusivity of your workplace?
   - How do you describe the perception of your colleagues in work place?

Section 2: Support Systems

4. School to work transition
   - Can you describe your transition from school to work?
   - What support did you receive during this transition?

- What were the challenges you faced during your transition from school to work?
- Can you share any successes or positive experiences from this transition period?

5. Vocational and education Training
   - What vocational training programs are available for people with visual impairment in your country?
   - If you take any vocational training before, can you please share your experience?
   - How effective are these programs in preparing individuals for employment?
6. Career Development and Advancement:
   - What opportunities for career development and advancement are available to you? Have you faced any barriers in accessing these opportunities?
   - How does your disability impact your career progression, if at all?
7. Reasonable Accommodation
   - Were there any specific support systems that helped you secure this employment?
   - Are there any support systems within your workplace that help you perform your job effectively?
   - How supportive has your employer been in addressing your needs as an employee with a disability?
   - How effective do you find these support systems?

Section 3: Strengths and Weaknesses of Existing employment measures

- What aspects of the employment measures you used were most helpful to you?
- Were there any challenges or gaps in these programs employment measures that you encountered?
- What improvements would you suggest for these measures to better support people with visual impairment in finding and maintaining employment?

Section 4: challenges in Employment

4. Challenges of Employment
   - What were the main challenges you faced in securing employment?
   - How did these challenges vary across age, gender, or type of disability?
   - Have you encountered any physical or digital barriers at work? How have these been addressed by your employer?

- Have you faced any challenges in receiving the necessary support? If so, how were they resolved?
- Have you experienced any form of discrimination or bias at work? How was it handled by your employer?
- How do you perceive societal attitudes and employer perceptions towards employees with disabilities?

Conclusion

5. Final Thoughts
    - Is there anything else you would like to add about the employment opportunities and challenges for people with visual impairment?
    - Do you have any recommendations for policymakers or other organizations working in this field?

Thank you for your time and insights. Your contributions are invaluable to this research

APPENDIX V: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR LABOUR, SOCIAL AFFAIRS, AND FAMILY OFFICE

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the employment opportunities and challenges of people with Visual impairment. Your honest responses to the interview questions are crucial for the success of this research. Please be assured that all your answers will be kept strictly confidential. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation!

Background of the organization/institution

1. Name of the organization:
2. Sex:
3. Position/Title:
4. Department/Office:
5. Organizational Role:

- Can you describe your role and responsibilities regarding the employment of people with disabilities?
- How long have you been involved in this area?

Section 1: Employment Opportunity

1. Current Employment Situation
    - How do you describe the current employment rate of people with visual impairments in your country or organization?
    - Is there a notable difference in employment rates between people with visual impairments and the general population?
2. Hiring Practices and Employer Engagement
    - What steps are being taken to encourage employers to hire people with visual impairments?
    - Are there any incentive programs or supports available to employers who employ people s with visual impairments?

Section 2: Support Systems

4. School-to-Work Transition
    - What programs or initiatives exist to support the transition from school to work for people with visual impairments?
    - Are there partnerships with educational institutions to support this transition?
    - What are the key challenges faced by students with visual impairments in this phase?
    - How are these challenges being addressed?
    - Are career counseling or job placement services available to students with disabilities?
5. Vocational and Educational Training
    - What vocational training programs or educational opportunities are available for people with visual impairments?
    - How effective are these programs in preparing them for employment?
    - Do these programs align with the current needs of the job market?
6. Career Development and Advancement
    - What opportunities for career advancement exist for employees with visual impairments?
    - Are there any initiatives in place to support ongoing professional growth?
7. Reasonable Accommodation
    - What specific support systems are provided to help people with visual impairments enter or remain in employment?
    - How do organizations ensure these supports are implemented effectively?
    - Are employers generally responsive to accommodation needs?

Section 3: Strengths and Weaknesses of Existing Employment Measures

8. Evaluation of Existing Measures

- What employment measures are currently in place for people with visual impairments?
- What do you consider to be the key strengths of these measures?
- What are the main gaps or challenges you've identified?
- Can you share any success stories where these measures led to positive employment outcomes?
- What improvements would you suggest to strengthen these programs?

Section 4: Challenges in Employment

9. Employment Barriers
    - What are the most common challenges people with visual impairments face in securing employment?
    - How do these challenges vary based on factors like age, gender, or type of disability?
    - How do societal attitudes and employer perceptions impact employment opportunities for this group?
10. Institutional Challenges
    - As an organization, what challenges do you encounter in implementing or supporting employment-related services for people with visual impairments?
    - What measures are currently being taken to address these institutional or systemic barriers?

Section 5: Final Thoughts

11. Is there anything else you would like to add about the employment opportunities and challenges for people with disabilities?
12. Do you have any recommendations for policymakers or other organizations working in this field?
13. Are there any new initiatives being planned to support the employment of people with disabilities?

Thank you for your time and insights. Your contributions are invaluable to this research

APPENDIX VI: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR DISABILITY ORGANIZATIONS

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the employment opportunities and challenges of people with visual impairment. Your honest responses to the interview questions are crucial for the success of this research. Please be assured that all your answers will be kept strictly confidential. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation!

Section 1: Background of the organization

H. Name of the organization:

I. Describe your organization shortly including target groups, mission and vision, when it established, etc.

Section 2: Employment opportunity

1. Current employment
   - Based on your observations, how would you describe the employment situation for people with visual impairment?
   - How do you perceive the employment opportunities for people with visual impairment compared to the general population?
2. Job Search and Hiring Process
   - How did people with visual impairment find their job?
   - What is the role of your organization in supporting people with visual impairment during job searching and hiring process

Section 3: Support Systems

3. School to Work Transition
   - Can you describe any programs or initiatives that support the transition from school to work for people with visual impairment?
   - How effective are these programs in facilitating successful transitions?
   - What improvements could be made to better support young people with visual impairment entering the workforce?
4. Vocational Training and Education

- What vocational training programs are available for people with visual impairment in your country?
- How effective are these programs in preparing people s for employment?

5. Reasonable Accommodations
   - Can you describe the workplace supports commonly provided to employees with visual impairments?
   - How do these support impact the employment and retention of people with visual impairment?
   - Are there any challenges in implementing these supports?

8. Career Development and Advancement:
   - What opportunities for career development and advancement are available for people with visual impairment?

Section 4: Strengths and Weaknesses of Support Programs

6. Strengths and Weaknesses of Existing employment measures
   - Describe the employment measures for people with visual impairment in your country?
   - What do you consider the strengths of the current employment measures for people with visual impairment?
   - What are the main weaknesses or gaps in these measures?
   - Can you share any success stories or examples where these measures have significantly helped people s with visual impairments secure employment?
   - What improvements or changes would you recommend to enhance these employment measures?

Section 5: Challenges in Securing Employment

7. Barriers to Employment
   - What are the main challenges faced by people with visual impairment in securing employment?
   - How do these challenges vary across different demographics such as age, gender, and type of disability?
   - Can you provide examples of specific barriers encountered by people with visual impairment?

8. Conclusion

Final Thoughts

- Is there anything else you would like to add about the employment opportunities and challenges for people with visual impairment?
- Do you have any recommendations for policymakers or other organizations working in this field?

Thank you for your time and insights. Your contributions are invaluable to this research.