

BLOGS

Case Brief: Mission Accessibility v Union of India

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In Mission Accessibility v. Union of India, the Supreme Court refused to let UPSC's good intentions stay on paper, and converted them into an enforceable, time bound mandate.

This case brief on **Mission Accessibility v. Union of India** follows the standard format used in law prep courses, covering the facts, issues, arguments, holding, and ratio of this significant disability rights judgment.

Citation and Bench

Case Name: Mission Accessibility v Union of India and Others

Citation: 2025 INSC 1376

Court: Supreme Court of India

Decided On: December 3, 2025

Bench: Justice Vikram Nath and Justice Sandeep Mehta

Jurisdiction: Civil original writ jurisdiction

Statutes and Provisions Involved: [Article 14](#), [Article 16](#), [Article 19](#), and [Article 21](#) of the Constitution, along with the [Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016](#)

Facts

Mission Accessibility, an organisation working for the advancement of the rights of persons with disabilities, filed a writ petition raising systemic barriers faced by visually impaired candidates and other Persons with Benchmark Disability, or PwBD, in the Civil Services Examination conducted by the Union Public Service Commission, or UPSC.

Two specific grievances formed the core of the petition. First, UPSC required candidates to furnish scribe details at the time of application itself, long before the actual exam date. This rigid requirement gave candidates no room to respond to real life contingencies, such as a scribe suddenly becoming unavailable, a medical emergency, or a candidate simply wishing to change their scribe closer to the exam.

Second, visually impaired candidates sought permission to use laptops equipped with Screen Reader Software, along with question papers provided in accessible digital formats, at all stages of the Civil Services Examination.

Procedural History

The Court allowed the Department of Personnel and Training, or DoPT, to be impleaded as a party by an order dated May 6, 2025. UPSC subsequently filed an affidavit stating it had received requests from approximately 27 PwBD or PwD candidates seeking a change of scribe, which it would examine on merit.

On May 9, 2025, the Court directed that all such requests be entertained up to May 18, 2025, and decided by a reasoned order within three working days. UPSC separately expressed concern that introducing Screen Reader Software for the imminent preliminary examination scheduled for May 25, 2025 was not logistically feasible on such short notice.

By an additional affidavit dated September 12, 2025, UPSC conceded, in principle, to introducing Screen Reader Software for visually impaired candidates, while citing its dependence on state governments and external exam centres as a practical constraint. The petitioner welcomed this in-principle concession but pointed out the complete absence of a concrete roadmap, timeframe, or operational plan, leaving affected candidates in continued uncertainty.

Issues

- 1. Whether UPSC's requirement to furnish scribe details at the application stage, without flexibility to change them closer to the exam, violated Articles 14, 16, and 21 along with the RPwD Act.**
- 2. Whether visually impaired candidates are constitutionally entitled to Screen Reader Software and accessible digital question papers in high stakes public examinations,**

and how quickly such facilities must be implemented.

- 3. How to balance the accessibility rights of candidates with disabilities against UPSC's genuine administrative and logistical constraints in conducting exams across numerous, often externally sourced, centres.**

Arguments of the Petitioner

Mission Accessibility argued that requiring scribe details months in advance failed to account for the dynamic nature of disability related support needs, since a scribe arranged early could become unavailable, unsuitable, or simply unwanted by the time the exam arrived. It contended this rigidity effectively penalised candidates for circumstances entirely outside their control.

On Screen Readers, the petitioner argued that modern assistive technology is not a discretionary favour but a necessary tool for genuine, independent access to examination content, and that UPSC's in-principle acceptance, without any binding timeline, risked remaining an empty policy statement rather than a lived reality for candidates.

Arguments of the Respondents

UPSC did not resist the underlying principle of accessibility, but argued that immediate, universal deployment of Screen Reader based facilities for the upcoming preliminary examination was not logistically feasible. It highlighted that, unlike many other examining bodies, UPSC lacks its own dedicated exam infrastructure and depends heavily on state governments, district authorities, schools, and colleges for physical exam centres, complicating any uniform technological rollout.

UPSC sought time to ensure feasibility, readiness, comprehensive testing, and the safeguarding of exam integrity before committing to a specific implementation timeline.

Holding

The Supreme Court disposed of the writ petition, but issued a detailed set of structural, forward looking directions rather than resolving only the grievances of the candidates immediately before it.

- 1. Equality demands removal of barriers, not mere formal sameness.** The Court held that constitutional equality under Article 14 does not require identical treatment for everyone, but the

removal of barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from standing on equal footing with others. This is a clear articulation of substantive, rather than merely formal, equality.

2. Disability accommodations are constitutional entitlements, not benevolence. The Court firmly held that rights guaranteed to PwD candidates are **not acts of benevolence but expressions of the constitutional promise of equality, dignity, and non-discrimination** under Articles 14, 19, and 21. Public authorities cannot treat these accommodations as favours to be granted or withdrawn at will.

3. Flexible scribe policies mandated for all future examinations. The Court directed that in every future examination notification, UPSC must permit candidates eligible for a scribe to request a **change of scribe up to at least seven days prior to the examination date**, with each such request objectively considered and decided by a reasoned order within three working days.

4. A concrete Screen Reader implementation plan is required within two months. Rather than accept UPSC's in-principle commitment as sufficient, the Court directed UPSC to file a comprehensive compliance affidavit within two months, specifying a plan of action and timeline for deploying Screen Reader Software, along with the feasibility of making this facility operational for all eligible candidates from the **next examination cycle**.

5. Uniform guidelines must be formulated with expert coordination. UPSC was directed to formulate uniform guidelines and protocols for Screen Reader Software and other assistive technologies, in coordination with the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities and the National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Visual Disabilities, ensuring standardisation, accessibility, and security.

6. The Union of India must provide full institutional support. The Court obligated the Union, through DoPT and the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, to extend all necessary administrative and technical support to UPSC and facilitate coordination with state governments and examination authorities.

7. Accessibility and exam integrity must be pursued together. The Court emphasised that implementation must ensure full accessibility for eligible candidates while simultaneously maintaining the sanctity, confidentiality, and fairness of the examination process.

8. Continuing supervision through a compliance hearing. Although the petition was formally disposed of, the Court retained limited supervisory jurisdiction by listing the matter again on February 16, 2026, for UPSC's compliance affidavit, effectively exercising a **continuing mandamus** over implementation.

Ratio Decidendi

Where a public authority's in-principle acceptance of a constitutionally required accommodation lacks a concrete implementation plan, timeline, or standardised protocol, courts may convert that policy intention into an enforceable, time bound institutional mandate through continuing supervisory directions, rather than treating the mere acknowledgment of the right as sufficient compliance.

Substantive equality under Articles 14 and 21, read with the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, requires the removal of structural and technological barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from competing on genuinely equal terms in public examinations, and reasonable accommodations such as flexible scribe arrangements and assistive technology are constitutional entitlements rather than administrative concessions.

Following this judgment, UPSC must now allow that candidate to request a change of scribe up to seven days before the exam, and must decide that request through a reasoned order within three working days, ensuring the candidate is never left stranded by circumstances beyond their control.

Why This Case Matters

Mission Accessibility v Union of India matters because it refuses to let good intentions substitute for enforceable rights. The Court could easily have accepted UPSC's in-principle commitment to Screen Readers as adequate progress, but instead it demanded a concrete plan, a fixed timeline, and expert-backed standardisation, recognising that a policy without implementation is, in the Court's own framing, merely a laudable objective on paper.

The judgment also builds meaningfully on earlier disability rights precedents like *Vikash Kumar v Union Public Service Commission* (2021) on reasonable accommodation, and *National Federation of the Blind v Union Public Service Commission* (2014) on access to public employment

examinations, extending their logic from basic physical accommodations into the realm of digital accessibility.

Conclusion

Mission Accessibility v. Union of India stands as a powerful example of structural adjudication in disability rights jurisprudence. By converting an individual writ petition into an institutional mandate covering flexible scribe policies, Screen Reader implementation, and standardised protocols, the Supreme Court ensured that constitutional promises to persons with disabilities move beyond paper and become genuinely lived realities in one of India's most consequential public examinations.