

BIG ISSUES IN OUR LIVES

## What Needs to Change

# What Decision-Making and Participation look like for People with Intellectual Disabilities

### Our Experience with Making Choices and Taking Part

Many people with intellectual disabilities are not allowed to make decisions about their lives. Sometimes we are held in guardianships, which means other people make all of our choices for us. We are often also excluded from taking part in politics, so our voices aren't heard when big decisions are made.

*To be fully included in our communities, we must be able to make decisions about our lives. We need to take part in making big decisions in our communities. These rights must be respected.*

*"Society does not really believe in the capacity of people with intellectual disabilities. People don't see our ability, they always think that we need someone else to speak for us or do something for us. We believe that this is the main barrier that prevents us from participating anywhere, including some organizations."*

SELF-ADVOCATE, BRAZIL



**Article 12 of the CRPD is about our right to make decisions and have control in our lives.**

## Our Rights

- It says that we have the right to choose things like where we live, what to vote for and how we want to spend money.
- It also says that we have the right to get support to make these decisions.

## Big Problems We Face

### Making Decisions

- People assume we can't speak for ourselves
- We are put under guardianship, which means someone else can make choices for us
- Our families often make decisions for us
- We don't get to make choices about our lives

### Meaningful participation

- We are excluded from places where big decisions are made
- Governments and organizations don't listen to us
- We don't get support to understand decisions

### Taking Part in Politics

- In many places we are not allowed to vote
- Information about voting is not easy to understand

*"Society does not believe in the capacity of people with intellectual disabilities. People don't see our ability, they always think that we need someone else to speak for us or do something for us."*

SELF-ADVOCATE, BRAZIL



*"I make my own decisions. That does not mean that I disagree when they give me advice. I seek support, but not permission."*

SELF-ADVOCATE, UNITED KINGDOM



## When Things Work Well

- We get good support to make decisions
- We get clear information about decisions
- Our decisions are respected
- We are included in making big decisions
- We can take part in elections

*“Legal capacity is a major issue. Without it, we can’t make our own decisions or even access basic services like banking or housing. This needs to change.”*

SELF-ADVOCATE, CROATIA



## What Needs To Change

### What Governments Can Do

- Make Better Laws
  - Stop barriers to making decisions, like guardianships
  - Include us in making new laws
- Support Inclusive Political Participation
  - Make information about big decisions accessible and easy to understand
  - Make voting places accessible

*“My country has made a law so that people can be supported to make their own decisions and choices. It says that people know what they want and what is right for themselves. It is so important that I get to make my own decisions about everything in my life.”*

SELF-ADVOCATE, IRELAND



### What Others Can Do

- Respect Our Decisions
  - Listen to people, not just their families
  - Value and respect our opinions



### Resources from our network

- [Listen Include Respect Global Guidelines on Inclusive Participation](#)
- [Independent But Not Alone: Global Report on the Right to Decide](#)
- [Guidelines on political participation of persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities](#)

*This document was made by self-advocates from the Inclusion International network. It was prepared for the Global Disability Summit in 2025. The German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) funded this work through UNICEF. The content represents the views of people with intellectual disabilities around the world — it does not necessarily represent what GIZ or UNICEF think.*



### OUR BIG MESSAGE ABOUT DECISION-MAKING AND PARTICIPATION

**People with intellectual disabilities around the world want our legal capacity to be recognized.**

**We want to be included in all decision-making processes. We should have access to information in formats that we can understand, for our equal opportunities and participation.**