



## Believe in Better

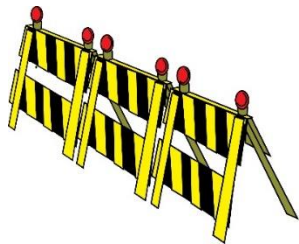
Shaping the future through the meaningful engagement of young persons with disabilities

### Challenges and barriers to meaningful engagement: what needs to change? – Part 1

**Meaningful Engagement:** Engage or engagement in this document means working in a meaningful way with young persons with disabilities. For example, making sure young persons with disabilities take part in making decisions.



## 11. Challenges and barriers – What needs to change? – Part 1



Young people with disabilities face different challenges and barriers when taking part in society.



Now, we will look at how these things act as barriers:

- Barriers that are part of the way society is structured
- **Norms** in society
- **Discrimination**

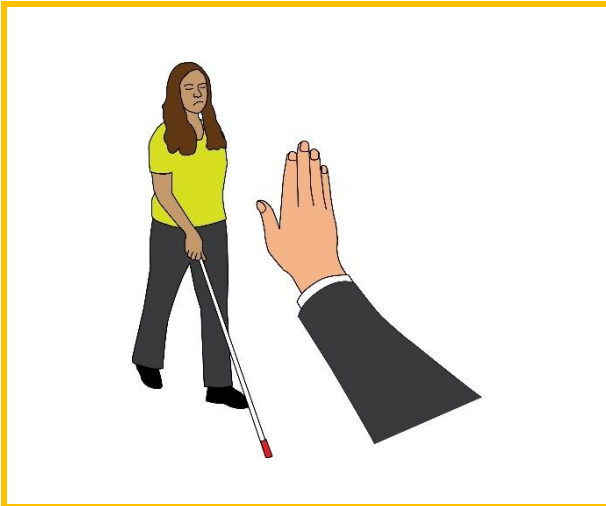
**Norms:** this means the ways that people are expected to behave in society.

**Discrimination:** this means being treated unfairly because of your background. For example, your disability, gender or race.



We want to find out which areas we must pay attention to. Then, we can find out which actions must be taken.

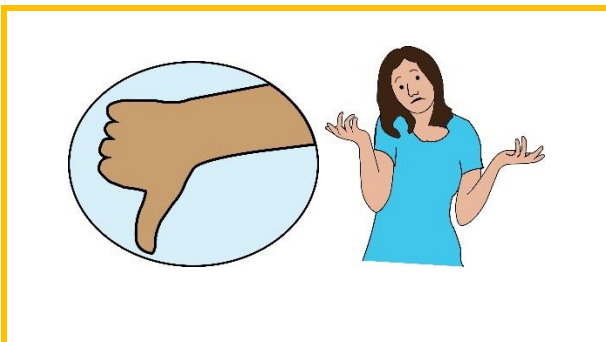
## A. Barriers in our culture and society



We must look at barriers that are built into our society and culture. Especially **ableism** and **adultism**. This will help us understand the barriers that young persons with disabilities face.

**Ableism:** this means prejudice and discrimination against people with disabilities. This is based on the bad views about the value of the lives of persons with disabilities. These views are deeply rooted in society.

**Adultism:** this means behaviours and attitudes based on the belief that adults are better than young people. It means believing that adults have the right to make decisions affecting young people without asking them about these decisions.



These norms lead to bad views and attitudes about young persons with disabilities.



They link up with other forms of **oppression**. For example, sexism and racism.

**Oppression:** this means taking power away.



These norms mean that power in society is not equal. Young persons voices, rights and opinions are often ignored.



A big barrier that people told us about was **stigma** and **stereotypes**.

**Stigma and stereotypes:** this means untrue or unfair beliefs about a group of people. Often, these beliefs are negative.



The **medical model** and **charity model** see persons with disabilities as people who must be protected or helped.

**Medical model and charity model:** these models focus on the person's impairment and the things they can't do. Instead, we must think about the barriers in society that persons with disabilities face.



These ways of looking at disability ignore the expert opinions of young persons with disabilities.



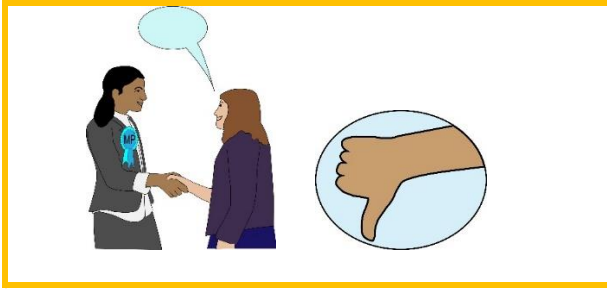
Often, this means that young persons take part in a **tokenistic** way. They are only part of decision-making to meet targets around **diversity**.

**Tokenistic:** this means when a group or person does something just to make it seem like they are being inclusive. For example, hiring a person with disabilities to appear inclusive.

**Diversity:** this means people from all different backgrounds taking part in making decisions.



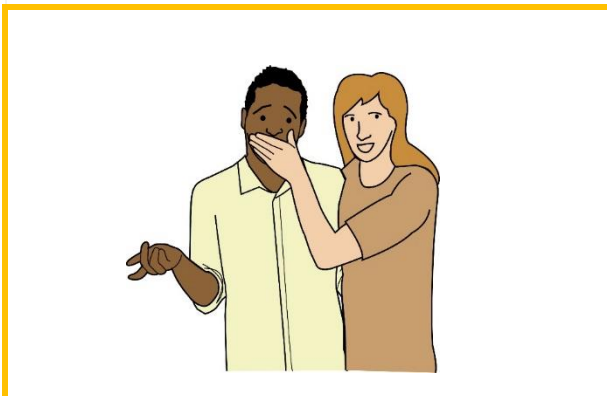
Ableism can push people out of decision making. They might not take opportunities because they are not confident enough.



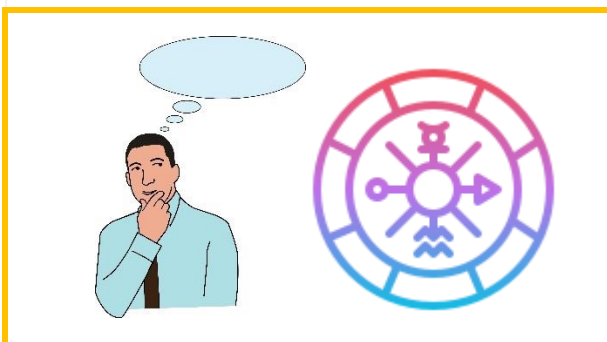
This means that young people don't engage in politics. Young people have told us that this is really important.



In some areas and communities, there are unfair beliefs about young persons with disability. For example, in some areas there a culture of shame.



This means that people are ashamed about having a family member with a disability. Families sometimes keep it a secret or hide the person from the rest of society.



In some cultures, there are **mystical beliefs** about disability. These beliefs push people out and put them in danger.

**Mystical beliefs:** here, this means having a magical or spiritual view about disability. For example, believing that disability is a curse or punishment by a god.



Adultism makes all these problems worse. In lots of countries people aged 30-35 are still seen as youth. People younger than this are seen as immature.



This point of view is even stronger when it comes to persons with disabilities aged 15-24. It is really hard for them to take part in decision making.



Different groups have a different view about what 'young persons' means. This means they are more likely to engage with people who are older than 24.



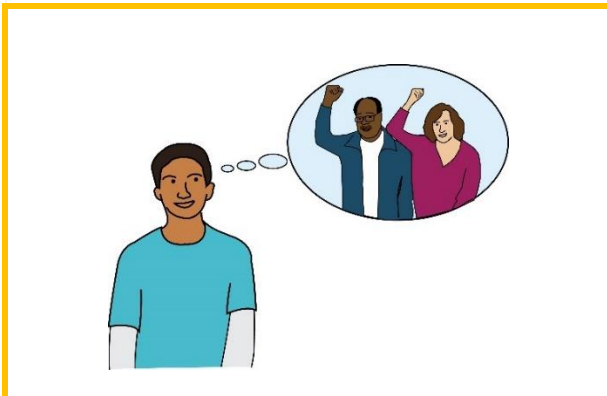
In society, people often try to protect young persons with disabilities too much. This is especially true for young women with disabilities.



This starts with families. It happens in the wider disability community too.



Decisions are often made for persons with disabilities. They are not given the chance to be independent and make their own decisions.



This attitude is patronising. It sees persons with disabilities as children. It doesn't respect the fact that they want to be **self-advocates**.

**Self-advocate:** this means standing up and speaking up about your own rights and issues that affect you.



## B. Discrimination based on gender



Discrimination based on gender is another big barrier to meaningful engagement.



Girls and young women with disabilities often face more oppression. They face the **intersections** of gender and disability.

**Intersectional:** this means thinking about all the different parts that make a person who they are. For example, a person might be Disabled, and young, and a woman. They are not just one thing. All these different parts affect how they experience the world.



Young women are at more risk of facing abuse, violence, and **neglect**. This all makes it harder for them to take part in society.

**Neglect:** this means when a person is not given the care that they need.



Young women with disabilities are often left out when it comes to making decisions. They are given less opportunities for training.



This all means that young women with disabilities become independent much later in life than young men with disabilities.



They are more likely to be unemployed. This means they face barriers around money. For example, paying for transport.



Society feels like they need to protect young women with disabilities too much. Young women are also less likely to talk about their own needs.

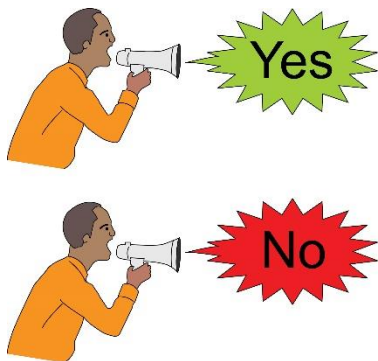


They have less opportunities to take part in public spaces. This means they have less opportunities to talk to other people and become more confident.



This all means that young men with disabilities have more **social mobility** than young women with disabilities.

**Social mobility:** this means being able to change your position in society. For example, coming from a poor background but being able to access opportunities in life. These opportunities support you to make more money and have a better life.

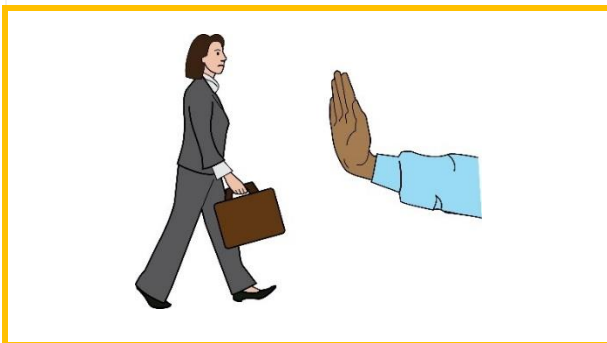


Young men are also more likely to be listened to. Their views are more likely to be recognised and responded to.



We live in a **patriarchal society**. There are lots of stereotypes around gender. These make challenges worse for young women with disabilities.

**Patriarchal society:** this means when men have the most power in society.



In some areas, norms act as big barriers to independence. They stop young women from being able to go where they want.



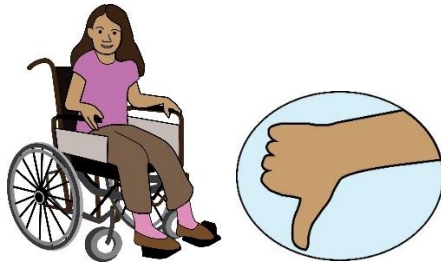
For example, there might be places where young women are not allowed to leave home by themselves. They have to go out with a family member.



These barriers all build up. They stop young women being able to take part in important discussions and decisions in society.



In the disability community, gender equality isn't always seen as important.



Some disability and youth organizations don't think about women and girls with disabilities.



For example, in some countries, youth organizations are mainly made up of men.



When young women try to talk about issues that are important to them, they are not listened to.

Young women told us that their views have been ignored by really important human rights defenders.



Sometimes government officials don't listen to young women either.

Young women face barriers when giving their opinion or disagreeing with something.



Sometimes they are told to change the way they are speaking. Or they are patronised. All of these challenges work to push young women out of decision-making.



We need these things to be **inclusive** for all genders:

- Making **policies**
- **Advocacy**

**Inclusive:** this means everyone can take part in a fair way.

**Policy:** this means rules set out by decision-making groups.

**Advocacy:** this means pushing for rights.



Some people said there have been some good changes for young women and girls, such as being seen more in disability advocacy movements.



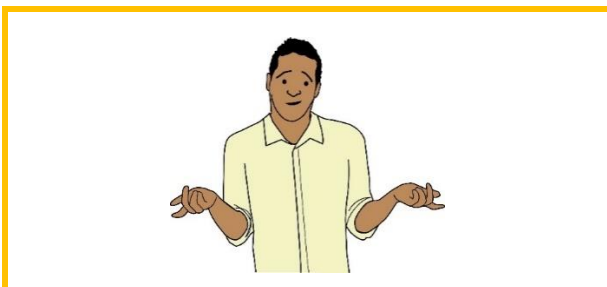
There are more girls and young women who are:

- Accessing information
- Knowing about their rights
- Becoming leaders



They have often been given **peer support**. This is a positive journey towards gender equality.

**Peer support:** this means when people who are facing the same experiences support each other.



The opposite seems to be happening for young men with disabilities. They seem to be taking part in **activism** less.

**Activism:** this means pushing for social change.



Some people suggested that this is happening because young men have access to better education and work in some regions. This means they have less time to take part in activism.



We also looked at young persons with disabilities who are **LGBTQI+**. They also face complicated challenges and barriers.

**LGBTQI+ or Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer, intersex +:** this means a group of people who have different genders and sexualities. These people often face discrimination because of who they are.



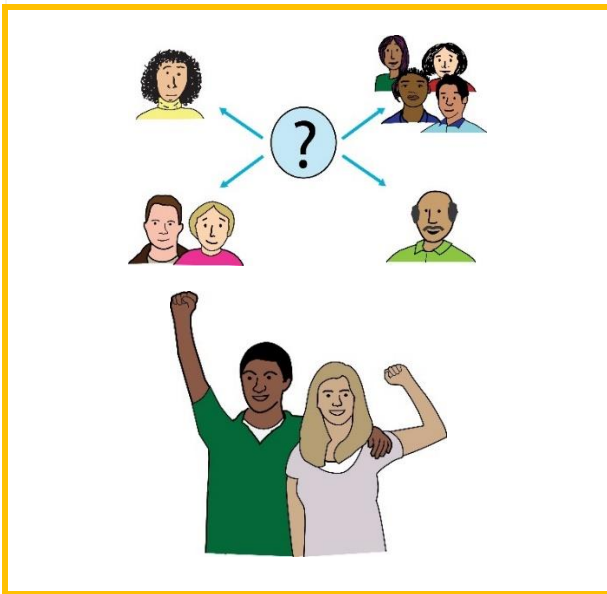
These people already face stigma and discrimination because of their gender identities and **sexual orientations**.

**Sexual orientations:** this means who you are attracted to in a romantic, emotional or sexual way. For example, someone who is the same sex as you, or someone of the opposite sex to you.





In some countries, people do not feel comfortable to tell people about their LGBTQI+ identities. This would lead to more discrimination.



But positive changes have been made in some regions. Young LGBTQI+ persons are:

- Making networks
- Supporting each other
- Taking part in advocacy



This is something that older LGBTQI+ people in these regions have not been able to do.

## C. Not being accessible or making reasonable accommodations

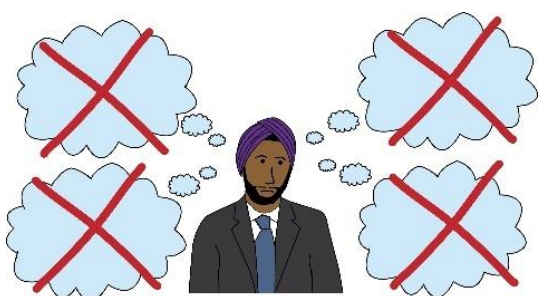
**Reasonable accommodations:** this means making changes so that Disabled people have fair access. For example, making changes to environments, ways of working or policies.



Society must be accessible for young persons with disabilities.

Young persons must be able to access:

- The environment
- Transport
- Information
- Communication
- Services

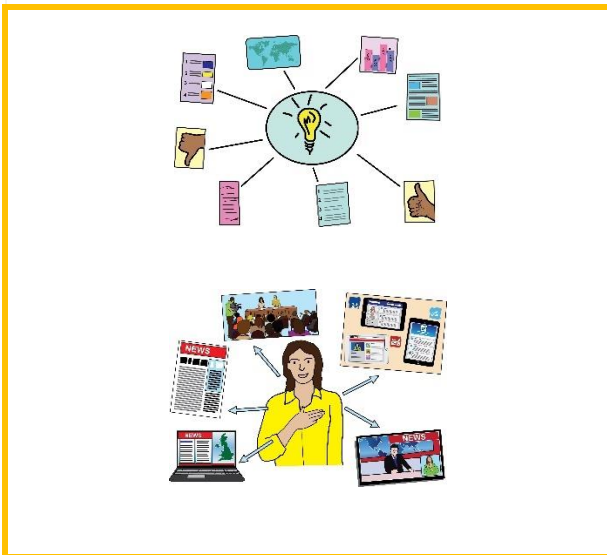


If things are not accessible, young persons with disabilities can feel very frustrated.

They can't communicate or take part in different parts of life.



Young persons with disabilities also can't always access digital platforms. For example, websites or apps.



This stops them from:

- Finding information
- Connecting with people
- Taking part in the digital world



When things are not accessible, this stops young persons from having rights and being able to take part in society.

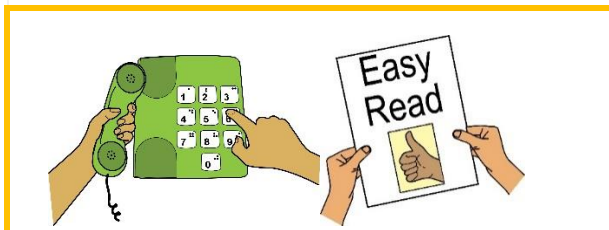


The following things act as barriers to meaningful participation:



- Buildings and facilities not being accessible
- No sign language interpreters
- Not enough accessible information
- Not enough accessible **information and communication technology**

**Information Communication technology:** this means any technology that can be used to make and share information.



There is not enough **adapted equipment**. There are not enough easy-to-read materials.

**Adapted equipment:** this means a tool or device such as a screen reader or stair lift, that has been adapted to support the daily living of persons with disabilities.

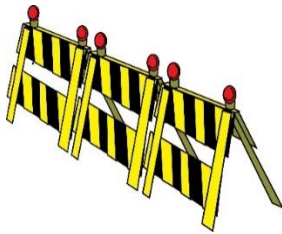


Persons with disabilities also face barriers to transport.



**The UN** seems to be better at meeting access needs than some governments.

**United Nations or UN:** this is a group of countries which work together to push for peace and safety around the world.



But young persons still face lots of barriers to meaningful engagement because they can't access important things.



Government and UN ways of working are often complicated. This leads to delays in support.



Often, the budget needs to be worked out early to support access needs. This can take some time.



Young persons with disabilities might need more support than adults. For example, they might need family members to come to meetings with them.



There are not enough policies in place to make accommodations and push for rights.



The budget is often limited. This means money can't be spent on making things accessible.



There is not enough awareness and understanding of:



- Reasonable accommodation
- **Universal Design**

**Universal Design:** this means building and creating things that are accessible to people with a wide range of disabilities.



Often, this leads to problems such as:



- Webpages that don't meet access needs
- Not choosing accessible venues
- Not having the right **infrastructure**

**Infrastructure:** here, this means structures that's society needs to run. For example, things like buildings, roads, and technology.



Persons with **intellectual disabilities** can't access activities that should be inclusive.

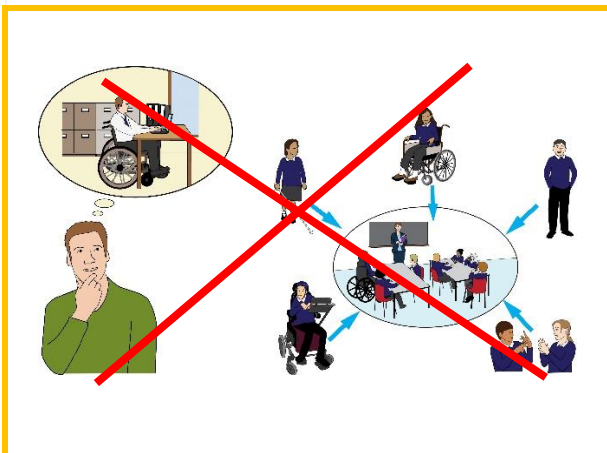
**Intellectual disabilities:** this means a disability that affects how a person learns knowledge and skills.



Young persons said that the most important barrier to meaningful engagement is not putting reasonable accommodations first.

## D. Marginalization

**Marginalization:** this means when a person or group of people are treated as less important than others in society.



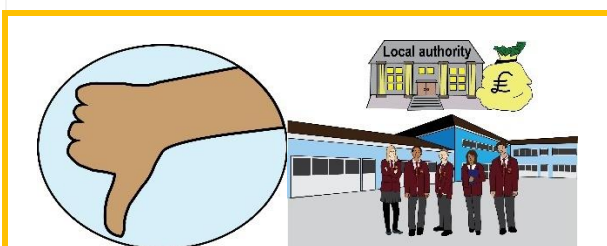
There are not enough opportunities for young persons with disabilities. Opportunities are not always accessible. This is especially true when it comes to education and work.



Young persons are left out and marginalized in the different parts of their lives.



Education is a really important path to taking part in making decisions. But lots of children and teenagers with disabilities can't access this.



Not very many **state schools** have the resources they need to be inclusive.



**State school:** this means schools that are run and funded by the government.



In some countries, young persons with disabilities are still in school at the ages of 15-24. This is because they had to start later or been delayed leaving school.

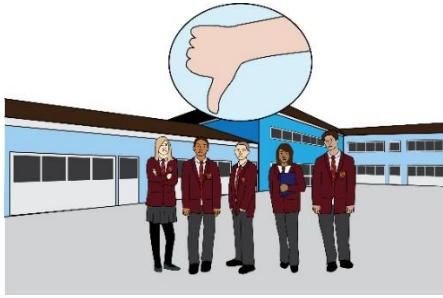


This puts up a barrier for taking part in making decisions. A young person might be too old by the time they reach the level of education needed to take part.



Not having enough opportunities for education means young persons are left behind. They are kept in a cycle of inequality. This inequality is social and **economic**.

**Economy or economic:** this means looking at money. It means looking at the way things are bought and sold within a country and how this affects the people living there.



Not having a good education makes it harder to get a good job. And not having a job makes it harder to access further education.



Not having a job makes it much harder to have economic independence. It makes it harder to look after yourself.



This makes it harder to take part in advocacy and decision-making. It also has a bad effect on wellbeing and quality of life.



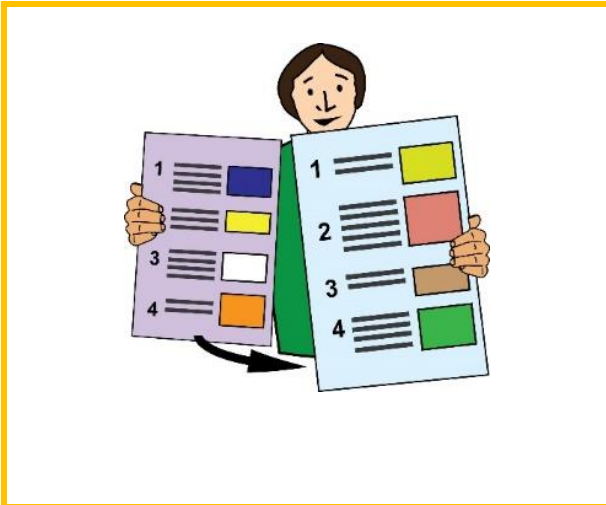
Language is another barrier to think about.

This is a big issue in platforms that work across the world. For example, the UN.

Not being able to speak English or not knowing the language in a country is a big barrier.



Language barriers lead to marginalization. Especially for people from poorer backgrounds. This makes it hard for them to take part in important discussions.



**This is the end of this document.**

**Please go to this part now:**

**12. Challenges and Barriers – Part 2**

This document was put into Easy Read by the Empower Team at People First.

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[www.peoplefirstltd.com](http://www.peoplefirstltd.com)

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**People First**

a voice for people with learning difficulties