

RFSD 2021 Plenary debate (14:40-15:30)

Youth representative	Ms. María Rodríguez Alcázar	Board member, European Youth Forum		3min
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My name is María Rodríguez, I'm a board member of the European Youth Forum.

Youth is disproportionately affected by the current pandemic. We were part of the first full session on youth in the main programme, a roundtable on *'Young people and COVID-19'*, which has shown just how severe the impact of the current situation is on us.

Students across the globe are reporting that the quality of their education is decreasing. A vast majority anticipate that their studies will be delayed as a result, leading to a slower school to work transition. In my country, Spain, the youth unemployment rate has risen to 40%, and globally at least 1 in six young people have lost their job since the pandemic began. Most of us are ineligible for emergency support from the state because of age-based discrimination, and poor quality jobs. As young people's precarity increases today, it does not come as a surprise that over half of young people are showing signs of anxiety and depression.

Despite these challenges, Covid-19 has shown us that when we all stand united for a common cause, rapid and far-reaching change is possible. Now we have to apply the same logic to the recovery. We don't want to go back to 'normal' because 'normal' was never working for the majority of young people. Our livelihoods have become insecure as a result of the years of austerity that followed the financial crisis. We must not repeat the same mistake. Rather than rebuilding a broken system, our recovery must be guided by a vision of a fairer, greener economy.

This can only be achieved with the inclusion of young people in recovery plans and by the establishment of permanent platforms for dialogue and engagement that will allow our voices to be heard and our actions to be supported at the local, national and international level, so that we can influence decisions on the matters that affect us the most.

Young people contributed as speakers to 8 of the 12 sessions in the Forum. We stand ready to contribute towards building back better. We refuse being called a "lost generation". It is now up to you to ensure that we can access our rights and to show that you are serious about meaningful youth participation in the recovery.

Thank you.