Introduction words

- Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak at today’s panel. It’s a privilege to be here today as part of the UNECE event, which the European Youth Forum also had the pleasure of speaking at 5 years ago.

- We are also delighted to be sharing the stage with our colleagues at AGE Platform, who we have had the pleasure of collaborating with to advocate for a life course approach to tackling ageism and promoting intergenerational solidarity.

- My name is María Rodríguez Alcázar and I am a Board Member of the European Youth Forum and oversee the work on young people’s social and economic inclusion. The European Youth Forum is the largest network representing over 100 youth organisations, which brings together the voices of tens of millions of young people from all over Europe. Our membership represents young people from all walks of life, who face complex and intersecting issues on a day-to-day basis.

- If you still wonder why there is a youth representative in this Conference, the reply is very simple. We share a common goal, a common challenge: addressing ageism.

Age-based discrimination

- As part of this year’s European Year of Youth, and having the opportunity to speak here today, I would like to draw on the parallel experiences that young and older people face, as a result of experiencing discrimination on the basis of their age.

- What I want to highlight is that this discrimination very clearly occurs at all aspects of life. I’d like to call upon decision-makers - including those present today - to take on a more holistic, coordinated approach when it comes to addressing ageism, when it comes to addressing these common experiences. In our view, all policies and laws must work for all people, of all ages.

Impacts of COVID-19

- The last few years have no doubt been difficult. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted many areas of existing - and worsening - examples of systemic
In our 2021 report ‘Beyond Lockdown: the ‘pandemic scar’ on young people’, we surveyed 4,450 young people and heard:

- that almost 12% of young workers stopped working,
- almost 75% reported learning less during the pandemic,
- while nearly two-thirds of young people were potentially affected by mental health and wellbeing issues (e.g. depression, anxiety).
- These impacts were much stronger for marginalised young people.

Quick summary of recommendations

- I have no doubt that many of these issues also resonate with those you are working with when it comes to older people’s experiences with regards to education, employment and mental health. This is why we are advocating for 3 things to ensure that no young or older person is left out:

  1. Taking a rights-based approach to all policies to ensure this life course approach;
  2. For decision-makers to provide sufficient spaces for meaningful youth participation and intergenerational dialogue, and
  3. For policy-makers to introduce a youth impact assessment (EU Youth Test) to all policies so that young people are accounted for and engaged in all policy-making processes.

- These recommendations support our vision in which all people, including youth, are recognised as active rights-holders, and can fully enjoy and exercise their rights and freedoms.

- I will leave my intervention for now here, and look forward to continuing the discussion here today with the other panellists.