



## IRENA COVID-19 Report Youth Input

On request from IRENA, the SDG7 Youth Constituency provided an input to the agency's report on the impact of COVID-19 on youth in the renewable energy sector. The submission is focused on impacts of the crisis, examples of youth action in the face of pandemic and policy recommendations for post-COVID recovery. It has been compiled with support from members of the constituency listed below.

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### Impacts of the crisis that are specific to youth (within RE context)

- **Disruptions to general education due to power outages**

The disrupted supply of labour and materials has caused power outages in some places of the world. The sudden isolation has led to a crisis that denies the possibility of continued learning of recent graduates as well as prevents the use of laboratories in universities which generates a poor practical education and therefore less capable professionals. Moreover, in developing countries, virtual learning platforms of schools, universities and other educational institutions have not matured fully, making it difficult for most youth to continue their studies online. Therefore, the distribution of knowledge has not been equal to all youth.

- **Disruption for high-school, college and young professional training programs, internships, apprenticeships and degree programs focused on RE**

COVID-19 shelter-in-place orders and the possibility of long-term social distancing guidelines may result in an indefinite suspension or cancellation of hands-on training and certifications for all kinds of installation, inspection, permitting and approval processes for renewables (especially solar).

It will be especially difficult to pursue remote instruction or e-trainings in under-resourced schools and impoverished communities that do not have access to broadband (wifi/internet) subscriptions and/or young people who lack adequate technological devices (PCs, laptops etc.) to continue their education remotely.

This is a double blow to youth employed (or hoped to be employed) in RE sectors. In addition to dealing with the uncertainties and anxieties of the pandemic, hundreds of thousands of potential new workers in the RE pipeline will find themselves in limbo or eventually divert to other pathways and prospects in the absence of timely and decisive interventions and fiscal relief for the RE sector.

Lots of paid co-op positions, internships, leadership development camps/workshops, and in-person incubators have been cancelled, which were many youth's immediate next step after graduation to learn more, start careers or pursue entrepreneurship related to RE. Now more than ever, many young people cannot afford to take on unpaid work. For the youth with renewable energy startups the operations had to be halted during the lockdowns. They had to let go or pause the employment of their employees who are predominantly youth.

On a positive note, it seems that many youth are buying into virtual programming, and noticing the opportunity to connect with people on a more global scale, beyond their immediate communities. Some of the youth have dedicated time to create awareness utilizing the popular web platforms, and some have focussed on improving their products as well as community engagement approaches to suit the challenging times.

- **Widening the energy access gap in developing countries**

The lockdown policies have caused a spike in virtual work and meetings, creating higher demand for electricity and thus, reducing electricity and energy available for cooking, cooling and heating. There has been a shift in peak power demand while overall aggregated power demand has reduced due to inactive industrial use of electricity.

- **Lack of energy for cooking and food storage**

During the COVID-19 lockdown, in the developing countries, many people do not have access to regular energy supply and thus end up with perished foodstuff. Hunger sets in to meet boredom, especially when considering the youth, who are out of school, locked at home, often in hunger and darkness. The situation makes it very difficult to comply with the government guidelines on COVID-19. Cooking gas, kerosine, petrol and diesel have all become too scarce and too expensive to power the small generators. Some renewable alternatives may include charcoal, solar energy and biofuel. However, as people are looking for alternatives to cooking gas, there is

a very high demand for charcoal stoves which are not available now as most of them are imported.

- **Jobs losses**

Many youth in developing countries have lost their jobs and do not have the skills to adapt to virtual work opportunities. Many engineers and coal workers, including youth, will never return to their places after the COVID, because the margins of the companies they were working for would become permanently even thinner. These people are going to face structural unemployment. Without a well-thought program of reskilling them for the RE industry their lives will become miserable, and that will translate into higher welfare costs for the societies.

- **Disruptions to research and development**

Young researchers in the renewable energy sector are being negatively affected by the crisis. Most experimental work on renewable technologies such as solar cells, wind and hydro turbines have been put on halt until further notice hence reducing productivity

- **Deepening of mental health problems**

In the face of COVID-19, the mental health of young people deteriorates as they see an unworkable future in the face of the effects of climate change, COVID-19, the labour crisis and an existential crisis characteristic at the age of 10-30 when youth seek to consolidate their plans for life. The mixture of these factors raises the levels of anxiety and stress in a generation that seeks to give everything better but blurred by insecurities.

- **Hindrance of youth RE and related climate advocacy efforts**

Youth-led climate action/advocacy has also been disrupted somewhat as young people cannot gather, meet with their local decision-makers, engage their communities in person, canvass for local/regional elections, or participate in conferences, etc, and as many young climate activists are the ones pushing most strongly for more renewable energy, this is also an unfortunate impact of the crisis. Also, a lot of youth-led RE start-ups have had their facilities shut due to the lockdown and then unable to meet their customer needs adequately while having to pay staff. That said, a lot of youth climate movements are adapting to organizing virtually really fast to try to keep the momentum going.

- **Greater adaptation of youth to the changing job market**

On the other hand, young people's ingenuity shines in times of crisis, the ease of adaptation to new technologies and new platforms make them more interesting profiles in companies that seek to maintain their productivity even working from home.

## Examples of youth led RE initiatives?

- SDG 7 Youth Constituency within the UN MGCY

- The official mandated space for youth and children within the UN system to engage in policy advocacy, capacity building, knowledge and action on SDG7 “Ensuring sustainable energy for all”

Youth NGOs, businesses and initiatives:

- Student Energy
- Renew Cycle Energy Limited
- Affordable energy access for vulnerable people
- Green City Force (Link: <https://greencityforce.org/>)
  - GCF trains young adults from frontline communities to, “power a green and inclusive economy, through service.” Their model corps program in New York City recruits and trains young people from low-income housing neighborhoods
- InstaPower
- GreenWatts
- ImpulSolar
- RedGirasol
- EGhaP eFish applications – Juhudi Africa Programme (JAP) and Africa Resources Think Tank
  - To boost economic gains of people living in rural area practicing small scale fisheries especially aquaculture by breaking their integration barrier with the global economy. The project envisages use of renewable energy sources especially solar systems in rural areas to refrigerate fish and fish products as they are supplied to households during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. The proposed project will be implemented in a 12 months period. This is justified because the trial version of the App is under construction and a prototype is almost ready. Further, the project also has a component that will utilise geothermal based steam for hatchery (hatching, filtration, reticulation and nursery tanks) and in the energy-food nexus that applies use of geothermal energy in the fisheries supply chain, including production, processing, storage, preparation and cooking.

## Policy recommendations to support youth (and enable their contribution) during the recovery phase A

The crisis is creating new needs and changing the way old needs are met. It presents an opportunity for youth to begin to think of new ways to meet these needs for a sustainable recovery. Instead of looking at the negative impacts, young people could start initiatives that promote the use of RE to meet health, food, transport and electricity needs. The current crisis should also be a call for the decision-makers to implement systemic changes that will help to address these needs.

- **Investment in renewable energy as priority of the recovery plans**

The momentum of implementation of renewable energy sources needs to be maintained despite the COVID crisis. Continuous deployment of RE is necessary as these energy sources empower people from vulnerable demographics, in particular women, children, youth and indigenous people. It is particularly relevant in the face of the ongoing volatility in the oil market. There needs to be immediate and substantial stimulus incentives and future subsidies to ensure recovery and rehabilitation of RE companies so they may be able to resume their operations and rehire and recruit hundreds of thousands of youth as part of the clean energy workforce. The RE sector has the advantage of ensuring more gender balance in jobs created.

- **Jobs creation in RE sector**

Further investment in the RE sector will generate new jobs since for every job lost in the oil sector, 3 jobs are generated in the renewable sector. These jobs will be available to young people with the technical capacity.

- **Support for youth initiatives in the RE sector**

As youths start their RE initiatives, they will need a lot of support, such as incubation and accelerator programmes, virtual training and connections with investors and mentors. Providing finance is a necessary aspect of this channel of support. Youth-led RE start-up should be considered to benefit from the various economic stimulus packages offered by governments to be able to recover from current losses.

- **Decentralising RE sector**

The crisis has shown the importance of decentralizing economic sectors, as well as production and technical know-how for operation and maintenance on a local level. Policies supporting youth in getting access to adequate training on renewable energy maintenance could be beneficial. Repairing and producing replacement parts locally makes communities more resilient to crisis situations where imports are limited. These projects should happen not instead of but in conjunction with infrastructural developments in the concerned countries and with genuine intent of building capacity locally

- **Renewable Energy Start-ups as Essential Businesses**

It is important that RE start-ups are considered as essential businesses to allow them to be exempted from the lockdown measures that will enable them to meet customer needs. Some have just only connected new customers before the lockdown and yet to collect finances that must have accrued especially in developing countries. And allowing them to resume quickly will prevent further job losses of staff who they are still struggling to keep on their payroll.

- **Better education**

It is necessary to provide pathways for reskilling young specialists made redundant by the decaying fossil fuel industry. Since protections instituted as consequences of COVID are going to remain for a substantial period of time, there may be a need to push for faster adoption of AR/VR

tech and equipment in education because it allows the same degree of presence and precision as training on site.

Training and certification programs may have to retool their education and training processes to be “hybrid” (primarily online, including demonstrations, till it is safe and possible to hold in-person training and convenings). E-learning for some possible course on RE that will significantly improve the technical skills of young people should be considered post pandemic.

- **Continued support and finance for research and development**

Youth are important in leading and supporting academic research, and taking technologies and knowledge from the lab to the real world. Young people are not engaged enough in this area as most of the offers will require 10 years experience or so, it really doesn't have to be that difficult always. Many young people with even less years of experience can deliver the goods.

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