IRENA YOUTH

IRENA
International Renewable Energy Agency

YOUTH IMPACT REPORT

FROM BENEFICIARIES TO BUILDERS



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About IRENA

The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) is an intergovernmental organisation that supports countries in their transition to a sustainable energy future and serves as the principal platform for international co-operation, a centre of excellence, and a repository of policy, technology, resource and financial knowledge on renewable energy. IRENA promotes the widespread adoption and sustainable use of all forms of renewable energy, including bioenergy, geothermal, hydropower, ocean, solar and wind energy, in the pursuit of sustainable development, energy access, energy security and low-carbon economic growth and prosperity.

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Data used in this report is from an unpublished alumni survey conducted in 2026 (*n*=39).

For more information visit: www.irena.org/Energy-Transition/Partnerships/Youth-Engagement
Information on IRENA's work and its meetings can be found at: www.irena.org/

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ABBREVIATIONS

AI	artificial intelligence
COP	Conference of the Parties
CSP	concentrated solar power
ESG	environmental, social and governance
EV	electric vehicle
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
IRENA	International Renewable Energy Agency
LDC	least-developed country
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NewGen	NewGen Renewable Energy Accelerator
PV	photovoltaic
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIDS	small island developing states
SLP	Student Leaders Programme
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UPME	Energy and Mining Planning Unit (Colombia)
WFES	World Future Energy Summit

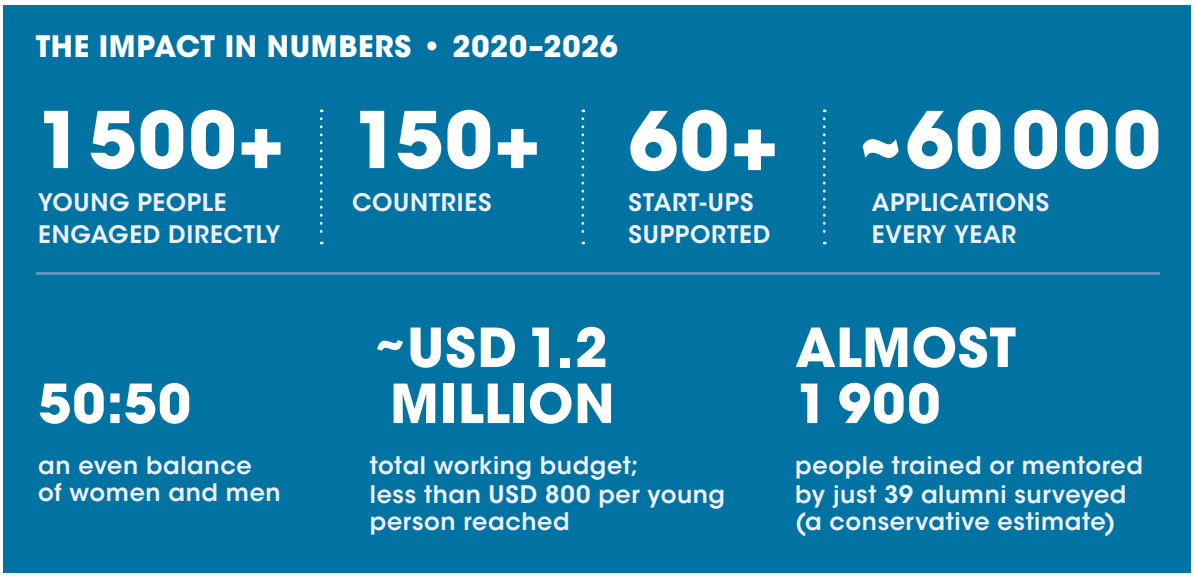


"Half of humanity is under thirty years of age; any strategy for the energy transition that treats that generation as an afterthought is doomed to fail. Over the past six years, we have welcomed more than 1500 young people from over 150 countries to participate in our Assembly, our Fora, accelerators and conversations with Ministers and CEOs; the results have exceeded all of our expectations. They have not simply learnt from us; they have founded companies, shaped national policy, and gone on to train and mentor thousands more in their own communities. They have evolved from beneficiaries to builders."

Francesco La Camera
Director-General, IRENA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between 2020 and 2026, IRENA's work with young people reached more than 1500 individuals across 150+ countries. In a remarkably short time, those young people have moved from being beneficiaries of the energy transition to its builders; they have founded companies, shaped national energy policies and trained thousands more in their own communities. This report provides an account of that impact – made possible by the voluntary contribution of the Government of the United Arab Emirates – and makes the case for using that success as a foundation for further activities.



THE CASE

The energy transition will be built by the young people who will live with its outcomes. Half of the world's population is under the age of 30, yet young people remain an afterthought in most energy strategies. The timing makes their inclusion urgent; renewable power has already won on cost, so the binding constraint is now the pace of implementation. The world's commitment under the UAE Consensus – to triple renewable energy capacity and double energy efficiency improvement by 2030 – requires further engagement from different stakeholders and an 'all-hands-on-deck' effort. Investing in young people is not an act of generosity towards the next generation; rather, it is a strategic necessity.

WHAT THE INVESTMENT PRODUCED

Scale, reach and balance. From a single Youth Forum of just over 45 delegates in 2020 to a year-round portfolio reaching more than 1 500 young people across over 150 countries, with women making up half of all participants and a deliberate priority on the Global South.

Enterprise. More than 60 startups launched or accelerated on every continent. Their founders have gone on to raise real capital, over EUR 2.5 million at Renergia in Romania, a USD 2 million round under way at Cassetex in Bangladesh and first seed funding at GeoArc Renew in Afghanistan.

The multiplier. On the most cautious reading of the alumni survey, 39 responding alumni reported directly training or mentoring almost 1 900 people within a year of their engagement. Alumni have contributed to building the tool by which Egypt tracks its climate commitments, taken seats in global governance and secured roles from the UNDP to the University of Cambridge.

Extraordinary efficiency. A total working budget of approximately USD 1.2 million – under USD 800 for every young person reached directly, and far less once the multiplier is counted.

Unmet demand. Roughly 60 000 young people apply each year, against fewer than 1 500 places over the whole period – a global waiting list, and the clearest signal that the model is ready to grow.



ReGen by YY ReGen - Third place winner, IRENA Rising Stars Award 2026, Lebanon

THREE CONVICTIONS, AND WHAT THE NETWORK ASKS FOR

The evidence supports three conclusions for the field. **Youth innovation is a cornerstone of the energy transition, not a courtesy,** it should be resourced as infrastructure, not outreach. **Innovation needs brave capital:** risk-free opportunity does not exist, and someone must back young founders early. **The coming decade will run on deep technology**, artificial intelligence, data and advanced systems, which young people are among those best placed to master. Asked what mattered most, 82% of alumni named connecting with a global network of peers; their clearest request is to make that community permanent, with pathways into real roles, access to finance, and deeper technical training.

THE ROAD AHEAD

The case is not to sustain this work, but to scale it up. Because the model is proven and its unit cost so low, additional resources translate almost directly into impact: at the demonstrated cost-efficiency, every further USD 100 000 would reach around 125 more young people directly, and many more through the multiplier effect. IRENA members and partners are invited to help in any way possible: to renew and increase the core contribution, sponsor a specific vertical, co-fund alongside the UAE, contribute in kind, or open pipelines of internships, placements and roles for alumni.

> A modest, catalytic investment in young people has produced impact out of all proportion. The greatest return now available will come from doing more, with more partners: to renew, multiply and join.



Youth Forum plenary

INTRODUCTION

The energy transition is the defining undertaking of our time, and it will be built by the young people who will live with its outcomes. This report tells the story of one deliberate decision to invest in them, and of what that investment produced. Its central finding can be stated simply: the young people IRENA supported have transformed – in a remarkably short time – from being beneficiaries of the transition to becoming its builders.

WHY YOUTH, AND WHY NOW?

Half of the world's population is under the age of 30. Young people are not a peripheral audience for the energy transition but one of its principal resources – the workforce that will install and maintain it; the innovators who will solve its most challenging problems; and the advocates who will hold governments to their commitments. Yet all too often they remain an afterthought in energy strategy.

The timing makes their inclusion urgent. Renewable power has decisively won the economic argument: the great majority of new capacity added worldwide is now cheaper than the lowest-cost fossil-fuel alternative. The obstacle is no longer cost but pace. Under the UAE Consensus reached at COP28, the world committed to triple renewable energy capacity and double the rate of energy efficiency improvement by 2030, an undertaking that demands an 'all-hands-on-deck' effort. Meeting it will require exactly what young people offer: fresh innovation, technical talent and the willingness to build.

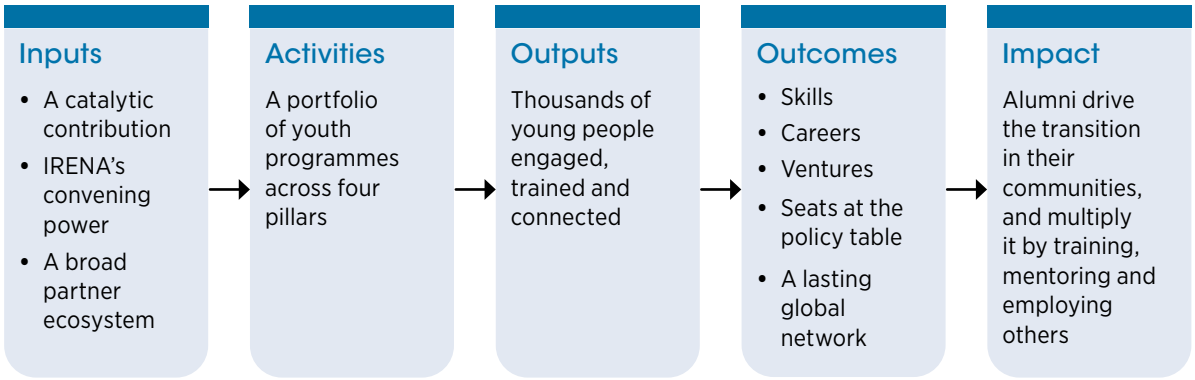


First Cohort of the IRENA NewGen Accelerator Startups attending IRENA Innovation week 2023

A CATALYTIC INVESTMENT

What began in January 2020 with a single Youth Forum of just over 45 delegates has grown into a year-round portfolio that includes convening, capacity building, enterprise acceleration and connections to the institutions that shape global energy policy. None of it would have been possible without the Voluntary Contribution of the Government of the United Arab Emirates, which turned an idea into a coherent, sustained programme.

Figure 1. **Theory of change: From beneficiaries to builders**





Young delegates in dialogue with the Deputy Director-General of IRENA

1

IRENA YOUTH IMPACT REPORT 2020–2026
THE APPROACH AND THE PORTFOLIO

This report has two aims: to give a faithful account of the impact of the programme between 2020 and 2026; and to make the case for the next phase. The findings draw on IRENA's programme records and on an alumni survey conducted in 2026, and they are presented conservatively throughout; indirect impact is estimated on the most cautious reading of the data, and IRENA claims only a contribution to its alumni's achievements rather than sole credit for them.

These achievements have not come from a series of well-meaning but disconnected events; they came from a deliberate approach, that was systematic, governed with young people rather than merely for them, and anchored in the world's shared goals.

1.1 FIVE PRINCIPLES

Youth as contributors, not symbols. Programmes are built for two-way exchange: young people are placed in dialogue with ministers, experts and decision-makers, and taken seriously as practitioners working on real problems.

Global reach with the Global South at the centre. Selection actively prioritises least-developed countries, small island developing states and developing countries.

Gender parity as a baseline, not a target. Women have made up half of all participants.

A pathway, not a single moment. The programmes are sequenced so a young person can move from first contact to leadership over time.

Catalytic and efficient by intent. Designed to turn modest resources into outsized impact by investing in individuals whose growth multiplies outward.



IRENA Youth Circle during the World Future Energy Summit at Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week

1.2 FOUR PILLARS, ONE PORTFOLIO

Figure 2. **The four pillars**

CONVENE

Bringing young people together with one another and with the decision makers of the energy transition.

Youth Forum; Innovation Week Youth Track; Youth Circle at WFES; Youth at the IRENA Assembly

CAPACITATE

Building the knowledge and skills young people need to contribute and lead, over weeks and months.

Student Leaders Programme; GROWTH@IRENA; Student Trainees

CATALYSE

Turning young people's ideas into ventures, with mentorship, investment readiness and business linkages.

NewGen Renewable Energy Accelerator; NewGen Rising Star; NewGen Hackathons for Youth

CONNECT

Linking young people to the institutions, networks and global processes that carry their work further.

Delegations to COP, UNGA and UNFCCC bodies; Youth Talk; alumni network; partnerships

1.3 THE PROGRAMMES AT A GLANCE

Table 1. **Youth reach by flagship programme, 2020–2026**

Programme	Pillar	Since	Scale over the period
IRENA Youth Forum	Convene	2020	1270+ delegates; the eighth edition convenes in 2027, grids, storage and flexibility for renewable energy systems
NewGen Renewable Energy Accelerator	Catalyse	2023	60+ start-ups supported (15–20 teams a year), with Enel Foundation and Social Alpha
Assembly, COP and UN engagement	Connect	2020	30–40 youth delegates at each edition, as Next-Gen Decision Makers and at COP, UNGA, the HLPF and UNFCCC bodies
GROWTH@IRENA, Student Leaders, Student Trainees	Capacitate	2020	200+ via the Growth Programme
Innovation Week - Youth Track	Convene	2023	30+ youth across the last two editions, in IRENA's flagship innovation dialogue
Youth Talk, Youth Circles and the Youth Council	Connect	2020	The always-on layer, a global webinar audience, and governance by young people on two-year terms

Note: Many alumni took part in more than one programme; figures indicate the scale of each programme from a total of 1500+ participants.

1.4 GOVERNED WITH YOUTH, EXTENDED THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

What makes the approach durable is that young people help to govern it. The IRENA Youth Council is the backbone of the portfolio: its members serve two-year terms, co-lead the Youth Forum, help shape capacity-building initiatives, and carry the Forum's conclusions to the Assembly as a youth Outcome Statement. The approach is also, by design, a networked one, drawing on partners across academia (*e.g.* Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi and the Mohamed Bin Zayed University of Artificial Intelligence); industry (*e.g.* ACWA Power and the Siemens Energy Innovation Hub); foundations and innovation partners (*e.g.* Enel Foundation and Social Alpha); and regional institutions such as the Arab Youth Center. These partners contribute expertise, platforms and in-kind support that extend the reach of the programme well beyond what the core budget alone could achieve.

The work is anchored in the frameworks that define the world's shared ambitions, the UN Sustainable Development Goals – in particular, affordable and clean energy, decent work, climate action, quality education and gender equality; the Paris Agreement; and the UAE Consensus reached at COP28.



"The energy transition will not be won by ambition alone; it will be won by execution. What we have learnt from working with young people over the past six years is that they are among the most capable executors we have, fluent in the technologies now reshaping this sector – from artificial intelligence to advanced storage – and impatient to apply them. Our task is to keep placing them at the centre of innovation, not at its margins."

Gauri Singh,
Deputy Director-General, IRENA

A young person might first encounter IRENA through a webinar, join the Youth Forum, take part in a traineeship or the Accelerator, represent youth at the Assembly or a COP, and then help govern the programme through the Youth Council, each stage reinforcing the last. It is this model, not any one event, that produced the scale achieved.

2

IRENA YOUTH IMPACT REPORT 2020–2026
IMPACT IN NUMBERS

This chapter sets out what the investment achieved, in numbers: how many young people took part, where they came from, and what it all cost. The figures are presented conservatively and individuals that took part in more than one programme are not double-counted. Together they establish three things: scale, reach and efficiency.

2.1 WHO TOOK PART

Between 2020 and 2026, IRENA's youth engagement directly reached more than 1 500 young people from over 150 countries and supported more than 60 early-stage startups.

Participants have been drawn overwhelmingly from the 18–35 age group and include students, early- and mid-career professionals, researchers and public-sector staff. What stands out is how many have gone on to launch their own ventures – entrepreneurship is a defining trait of this community rather than an exception. From the outset, selection has actively encouraged participation from least-developed countries, small island developing states and developing countries, directing support towards the places where the energy transition is most difficult and most consequential.

Figure 3. **Gender balance across the portfolio, 2020–2026; parity treated as a baseline to maintain, not a target to achieve**



2.2 A DEMAND THE CURRENT BUDGET CANNOT MEET

Each year, some 60 000 young people apply to take part in IRENA's youth activities; yet across the entire 2020–2026 period, just over 1 500 could be engaged directly. Hence, this is not a problem of interest, awareness or relevance – those are already secured; it is a problem of capacity alone; as such, it also represents the central opportunity presented in this report.

Figure 4. **Demand and capacity: Annual applications against places available**



2.3 A CATALYTIC INVESTMENT

The entire portfolio described here has been delivered on a total working budget of approximately USD 1.2 million, made possible by the Voluntary Contribution of the Government of the United Arab Emirates. Under USD 800 per young person reached is a figure that means little on its own, and it is worth being precise about what it does and does not represent.

It counts only those reached directly, and not the far larger community those young people went on to train, mentor and serve. It also covers not a single interaction but a pathway: a young person may enter through a webinar, attend a Forum, take part in a traineeship or an accelerator programme, represent youth at the Assembly or a COP, and go on to help govern the programme, all for USD 800.

It also understates the resources behind the results. Expert mentors, venues, technical workshops, platforms and networks were lent rather than purchased. The catalytic contribution did more than fund a programme: it unlocked the participation of others, so that each dollar was matched by expertise and access it did not have to buy. What the figure measures, ultimately, is not frugality but leverage – a model that turns a modest cash base into a portfolio no comparable budget could have purchased outright.



"The UAE invested not in individual projects, but in the potential of young people to drive lasting change. The greatest return is seeing that investment multiply, as young leaders become innovators, entrepreneurs and builders of a sustainable energy future."

Dr Nawal Al-Hosany
Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates to IRENA

Three facts define the numbers: scale (more than 1 500 young people across more than 150 countries); efficiency (under USD 800 per direct beneficiary); and unmet demand (around 60 000 applications a year against fewer than 1 500 places). Each is a floor rather than a ceiling, because the true return is measured not in who was reached, but in what they did next.

3 IRENA YOUTH IMPACT REPORT 2020–2026
FROM BENEFICIARIES TO BUILDERS

Counting participants is the easiest way to measure a youth programme, and the least revealing. The energy transition is not advanced by the number of young people who attend a forum; it is advanced by what they build, lead and pass on once they leave the room. The true measure of this work is not how many were reached, but how many went on to reach others.

Box 1. Survey methodology

The data in this chapter are drawn from the IRENA *Youth Alumni Impact Survey 2026*, completed by 39 alumni. IRENA does not claim sole credit for what its alumni achieved, an IRENA programme was one of several factors alongside the individual's own talent, their employers and other institutions.

Where alumni reported their reach in bands (for example, "11–50 people"), the calculation uses the lowest number in each band. According to this most cautious reading, the 39 responding alumni reported directly training, mentoring, teaching or formally supporting almost 1900 people within just 12 months of their IRENA engagement, roughly 48 each.

Respondents were self-selected and skew towards recent cohorts, so they are best understood as an illustrative window into the alumni community rather than a statistical estimate for all recipients. Were this conservative pattern to hold more widely, the number of people reached by IRENA alumni would extend well into the tens of thousands.

3.1 KNOWLEDGE, CAREERS AND ENTERPRISE

Knowledge and skills. Alumni point consistently to technical knowledge of renewable energy systems gained from exposure to real-world cases, and the confidence to apply it. Hassan Sheikhdon of Somalia used the global perspective gained at the 2026 Youth Forum to secure a Master's at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi; Biruh Tesfa Chalie of Ethiopia, an undergraduate when he joined GROWTH@IRENA, has since published research on building-integrated photovoltaics and bifacial solar cells.

Careers and livelihoods. Time and again, alumni describe an IRENA programme as the moment a career changed direction. Alevtyna Prykhodko of Ukraine returned from the Assembly, launched a low-carbon project at the refinery where she worked, and shortly afterwards received an offer, with a scholarship, to study energy systems at the University of Oxford. David Ricardo Velasco Munar of Colombia was promoted to a Senior Solar PV Engineer at Mott MacDonald, where he supports more than 2 GW of projects across Latin America. Alvin Tepo Togba of Liberia traced his path from intern to full-time international development professional, across more than 40 projects in over 26 countries, directly to the horizons opened at the Youth Forum.

Enterprise and innovation. The NewGen Accelerator alone has supported more than 60 startups from every continent. Renergia, co-founded by Ioan-Dacian Jurj of Romania, has secured more than

EUR 2.5 million in European funding for artificial-intelligence-driven energy management. Cassetex, the women-led venture of Priyanka Nandi of Bangladesh, is growing threefold year-on-year and raising USD 2 million. Treeva, led by Anjali Devadasan of the United Kingdom, has installed its turbines alongside mainline railways and earned its founder a place on the Forbes 30 Under 30 list. GeoArc Renew, founded by Rohina Kabir of Afghanistan, has secured USD 120 000 in seed funding. These are not pilots in search of a purpose; they are companies raising real capital and creating jobs.



H.E. Dr. Amna Al Dahak - UAE Minister of Climate Change and Environment participating in a fire-side chat facilitated by Thaynara Leal and Hadiza Abdulmumini, Members of the IRENA Youth Council 2024–2026

3.2 POLICY, ADVOCACY AND COMMUNITY MULTIPLICATION

A striking number of alumni have moved from advocating for the energy transition to helping govern it. Ramy George Yacoub of Egypt, as a Climate Change Advisor with GIZ, led the development of Egypt's national digital tool for tracking Nationally Determined Contributions. Kaidi Ru of China serves as an observer to the UNFCCC Technology Executive Committee. Ana Maria Ramirez Tovar of Colombia advises the country's Energy and Mining Planning Unit and has helped shape the regulatory framework for energy communities. Yugmee Gidiya joined the YOUNGO Energy Working Group as a Policy and Governance Co-ordinator.

The returns are most significant where a single beneficiary becomes many. Beniamin Strzelecki of Poland helped organise the Student Energy Summit 2023, convening 650 young people from 130 countries on the sidelines of COP28. Alevtyna Prykhodko has run climate and leadership bootcamps for more than 150 Ukrainians. Livia Maria da Silva Mello of Brazil has mentored 20 high-school girls and opened the door for 15 young people from her community to join a global youth summit. This is the multiplier in human form.

Figure 5. **The multiplier**

39	~1 900	~1 500
Alumni surveyed	People trained or mentored within 12 months	Alumni in the network

Source: IRENA *Youth alumni impact survey* (2026 unpublished).
Note: Data calculated using the most conservative reading.

3.3 WHAT WE WOULD DO DIFFERENTLY

This report makes a case that is strengthened by an open and honest assement of where the evidence is thin and where the work fell short:

FOLLOW-UP WAS NOT BUILT IN FROM THE START

The most significant limitation of this report is that IRENA cannot fully account for what became of the young people it reached. The *Youth alumni impact survey 2026* drew 39 responses from a community of around 1500. Those responses are consistent and striking, and they are treated here with appropriate caution – they are a window, not a census.

Systematic follow-up was not designed into the early programmes. The cost of that decision is visible on every page: the impact documented here is a fraction of that which occurred, and the difference cannot be recovered retrospectively. A longitudinal tracking system, with consent obtained at the point of participation, structured follow-up at fixed intervals and results published, is therefore a first-order priority for the next phase. It is also inexpensive relative to what it would allow IRENA and its partners to demonstrate. A structured alumni network for the youth engagement programmes would add further value, capturing more impact stories and figures over the years.

DEMAND IS MET ONLY AT THE MARGINS

Around 60 000 applications a year against fewer than 1500 places over six years are presented as evidence of demand. It also illustrates a failure to meet that demand. Each unsuccessful application is a young person who met the threshold of interest and received nothing in return.

The selectivity that follows is genuinely valuable: a pipeline of this ratio identifies exceptional young people in the energy field earlier and more reliably than almost any comparable process. But identification without capacity is a half-built asset. The programme is very good at finding the people it cannot then serve.

CONVENING HAS BEEN EASIER TO FUND THAN WHAT FOLLOWS IT

Across the portfolio, the moments of contact (forums, tracks and delegations) have been easier to resource than the sustained support that comes after them. Asked what would make the greatest difference, alumni pointed not to recognition but to seed capital, introductions and real roles.

The honest reading is that IRENA has been better at opening doors than at funding what lies beyond them, and that the network alumni value most highly has been sustained largely by their own effort rather than by dedicated resources. The most valued asset of the whole programme is, at present, its least funded part.

> The young people IRENA invested in did not absorb that investment and stop; they compounded it, into skills that became platforms, careers that became influence, companies that became employers and knowledge that was shared with thousands of others.

4

IRENA YOUTH IMPACT REPORT 2020–2026
WHAT CHANGED INSIDE THE INSTITUTION

The clearest measure of a youth programme is not only what it does for young people. It is also what it changes about the institution that runs it.

Most youth engagement in multilateral organisations is consultative. Young people are invited, heard, thanked and sent home; the decisions are taken afterwards by others in rooms they do not enter. A programme built this way can run for a decade and leave nothing behind, because nothing in the institution has been obliged to change. When the funding stops, the invitations stop, and the record closes.

That is not the case here. Over the period covered by this report, young people moved from being an audience for IRENA's work to taking part in how it is governed. Three aspects, in particular, are structural rather than symbolic:

YOUNG PEOPLE HELP GOVERN THE PROGRAMME

The IRENA Youth Council is the backbone of the portfolio, and its role is a working one rather than a ceremonial one. Members serve two-year terms. They co-lead the Youth Forum, help shape the capacity-building initiatives that follow it, and carry the Forum's conclusions to the Assembly as a youth Outcome Statement. The latter is highly significant; a body composed of young people produces a document, and that document is presented at a meeting of IRENA members. It is a standing channel from a youth constituency into the Agency's principal governing forum, and it operates whether or not any individual champion is in post.

Two-year terms matter for the same reason. They mean the Council renews as one cohort hands over to the next, so the arrangement does not depend on any individual, any single generation of alumni or any one member of staff. This is the difference between designing a programme *for* young people and designing it *with* them, and between a good intention and a standing obligation. Where consultation can be quietly dropped when budgets tighten or priorities shift, a constituted body with fixed terms has to be actively dismantled. That asymmetry is the whole point.

It also changes what alumni are. Ahmed Mahmoud came to IRENA as a youth delegate to the 15th Assembly and later served on the Youth Council, returning in 2026 to run a workshop for the cohort that followed him. The pathway does not end at participation; it ends at responsibility for the programme itself.

YOUNG PEOPLE SIT IN THE ASSEMBLY, AND IN THE ROOMS BEYOND IT

IRENA's Assembly is a meeting of IRENA members. Between 30 and 40 youth delegates take part in each edition, and the Next Generation Decision Maker recognition places a young person directly into its proceedings. At the fifteenth Assembly, youth delegates debated the tension between tripling renewable energy capacity and delivering energy justice, not as a parallel session held elsewhere in the building but as part of what the Assembly considered that year.

Beyond Abu Dhabi, IRENA-supported delegations have carried young people into COP, the United Nations General Assembly, the High-Level Political Forum and UNFCCC bodies, where agendas are set and text is negotiated.

What matters here is not the attendance figure. It is that the seat has become expected. A youth delegation at the Assembly is no longer an experiment requiring fresh justification each year; it has become part of how the Assembly is convened, and its absence would now be noticed.

A SINGLE EVENT BECAME A PERMANENT FUNCTION

In 2020 this work consisted of one Youth Forum with just over 45 delegates. It now runs year-round across four pillars, with an always-on layer of webinars and Youth Circles between the set-piece moments, and a pathway that carries a young person from a first webinar through to a governing role. A young person entering the portfolio today encounters a structure; the first cohort encountered an event.

That progression is easy to state and hard to achieve. It required the work to move from something the Agency hosted to something the Agency does, with programmes that recur, cohorts that hand over to one another, and an alumni community that persists between meetings rather than dispersing after them.

> **Why this matters for what comes next.** Careers advance and companies scale, and both are worth documenting; but an individual's success travels with them, whilst a governance structure stays behind. The young people reached between 2020 and 2026 will move on to other things; the Youth Council, the Outcome Statement, the Assembly seat and the expectation that young people are consulted before decisions are taken will remain, shaping what successors are able to do. This is the most durable return the investment has produced. This report does not call to repeat the achievements of the programme, but rather to consolidate that success.

5

IRENA YOUTH IMPACT REPORT 2020–2026
FIVE JOURNEYS

This chapter describes five journeys, chosen from across the alumni network for their diversity of region, gender, programme and impact, and told wherever possible in the alumni's own words. Each person quoted has given their consent to be named.

Jaafar Abdulkadir, Nigeria



"An architect of the future"

"IRENA showed me proof that any young person with the right preparation and conviction has the agency and the standing to be an architect of the future, not just its inheritor."

Jaafar Abdulkadir, Nigeria

Programmes: Youth Forum, UNGA80, bilateral with the IRENA Director-General (2025)
Today: MPhil candidate in Energy Technologies, University of Cambridge; Sustainable Energy Hub, UNDP; founder, APEN Energy

Before IRENA, Jaafar Abdulkadir describes himself as "just a young person, with a passion to solve the energy access crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa", but without the tools, the network, or the confidence to act on it. He was sitting on a completed application to the University of Cambridge that he had not sent, because he did not believe he would be admitted. The 2025 Youth Forum changed that: he joined his first panel, found himself "in a room filled with people willing to listen to my inputs," pitched his startup APEN Energy for the very first time, and met Riad Meddeb of the UNDP Sustainable Energy Hub.

That first conversation grew into a lasting mentorship and a role at UNDP. Emboldened by advice from fellow delegates, he sent the application, and was admitted. He is now reading for an MPhil at Cambridge, mentoring other young people, and has pitched APEN Energy at UNGA80 at IRENA's invitation.

Ana Maria Ramirez Tovar, Colombia



From policy design to territorial transformation

"IRENA helped me transform inspiration into direction: it professionalised my ideas, expanded my confidence, and showed me that the energy transition needs both global vision and grounded territorial action."

Ana Maria Ramirez Tovar, Colombia

Programmes: NewGen Accelerator (2024), Innovation Week Youth Track (2025)
Today: Founder, Blumergy; adviser to Colombia's Energy and Mining Planning Unit
The impact: helped structure 42 energy communities across Colombia

Ana Maria Ramirez Tovar came to IRENA already working inside the Colombian government on the regulatory frameworks for energy communities, but restless with a question: how to move from designing policy on paper to achieving real transformation in territories. The turning point came at IRENA's Innovation Week in Bonn, where she was invited to deliver the closing remarks, and came to see her national work as part of a broader global movement.

Through Blumergy she has since supported the structuring of 42 energy communities across Colombia, integrating governance, technical analysis, regulation, finance and community participation in each. The ripple, in her words, has reached "communities, public institutions, and young professionals who now have stronger tools to participate in and implement the energy transition."

Priyanka Nandi, Bangladesh



Putting women at the centre of the transition

"Local energy solutions need a global stage like IRENA, to multiply impact, scale faster and be global."

Priyanka Nandi, Bangladesh

Programmes: NewGen Accelerator (2025) - Rising Star

Today: Founder, Cassetex; World Energy Council Future Energy Leader

The impact: women-led "micro-energy entrepreneur" model; reports reaching more than one million people; raising USD 2 million.

Priyanka Nandi founded Cassetex in Bangladesh in 2024 with a hard proposition: to make clean energy accessible, affordable and reliable, all the while standing against business-as-usual, as a startup in the developing world. Early on, she and her team reached the conviction that would define the venture, that the greatest impact lay in putting women and youth at the centre of the transition.

NewGen 2025 offered the global stage to scale that model. Since then Cassetex reports reaching more than one million people, empowering hundreds of women, and growing threefold year on year; it was selected by Imperial College London for the Commonwealth Startup Fellowship and is working to raise USD 2 million. Named an IRENA NewGen Rising Star and subsequently a World Energy Council Global Future Energy Leader, Priyanka now supports incoming cohorts.

Rohina Kabir, Afghanistan



"Lived experience is also expertise"

"IRENA helped me see that youth from fragile and conflict-affected regions are not only witnesses to global energy challenges, but builders of the solutions that can transform them."

Rohina Kabir, Afghanistan

Programme: Youth Forum (2026)

Today: Founder, GeoArc Renew, geospatial identification of renewable-energy opportunities in fragile and underserved regions; USD 120 000 in seed funding

Rohina Kabir came to IRENA trying to connect policy, climate resilience and technology in a more practical way. Her motivation was personal: connected to Afghanistan, she wanted to support renewable-energy planning in places contending with unreliable electricity, poverty, displacement and climate vulnerability. At the 2026 Youth Forum, surrounded by young people from very different parts of the world, she came to see that "lived experience is also expertise", and that GeoArc Renew was not merely an idea but a potential breakthrough.

The platform combines geospatial data, energy-demand indicators, infrastructure gaps, cost and socio-economic vulnerability to identify where solar, hydro and hybrid solutions could be the most beneficial. She has secured USD 120 000 in seed funding, with a first release in October 2026 and an ambition to extend across Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Ahmed Mahmoud, Egypt/United States



Recognition that changed a career

"Being selected as IRENA's Next Generation Decision Maker during the 2025 15th Assembly was simply the turning point of my career... recognition that changed my life professionally and personally."

Ahmed Mahmoud, Egypt/United States

Programmes: IRENA Assembly Youth Forum (2025, 2026); Youth Council

Today: Vice-President, Business Development, FortyGuard (Abu Dhabi)

The impact: Egypt's Nasser Fellowship (first US fellow); partnerships with Google, NVIDIA and Microsoft; returned to mentor the next cohort

When Ahmed Mahmoud came to IRENA in January 2025, he was leading commercialisation for a clean-hydrogen startup in the United States amid real uncertainty. Selection as a youth delegate to IRENA's 15th Assembly proved a turning point: during the youth debate on the intersections between tripling renewable capacity and achieving energy justice, listening to delegates from small-island and developing states, he shifted from a technology-first mindset to one centred on equity, accessibility and context.

His career then accelerated sharply. He was selected for Egypt's Nasser Fellowship for International Leadership, the first US fellow across five cohorts, and joined FortyGuard, where he built the business-development function from scratch, secured partnerships with Google, NVIDIA and Microsoft, and drove a USD 5 million pipeline in six months. In 2026 he returned to IRENA to lead a youth workshop on effective pitching, equipping the next cohort to secure the support he once sought.

6

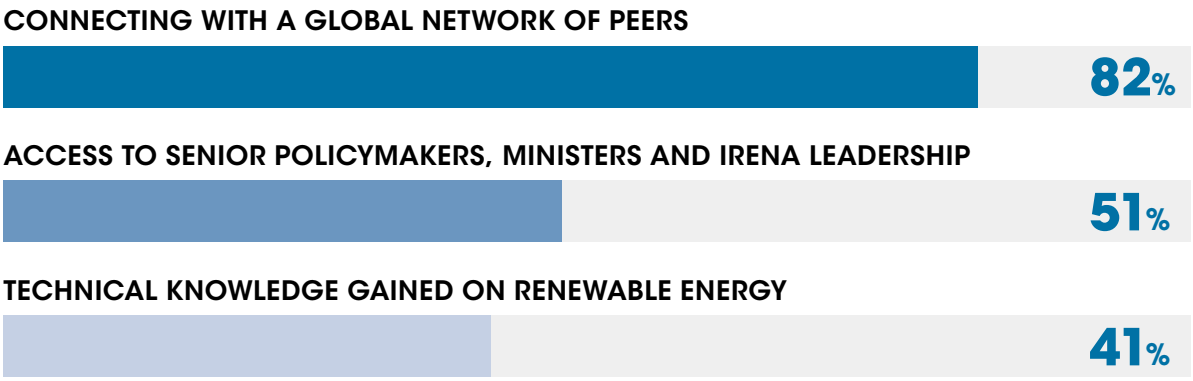
IRENA YOUTH IMPACT REPORT 2020–2026
VOICES FROM THE NETWORK

Programme records show what IRENA did. To learn what it meant, IRENA asked its alumni directly. The IRENA Youth Alumni Impact Survey 2026 was completed by 39 alumni; respondents were self-selected and skew towards recent cohorts, so they are best read as an illustrative window into the community rather than a representative sample. Even so, the consistency of what they report is striking.

6.1 WHAT ALUMNI VALUED MOST

Asked what had been most inspiring, alumni pointed overwhelmingly to one thing: each other.

Figure 6. **What alumni valued most: Most-inspiring aspects**



Source: IRENA *Youth alumni impact survey* (2026).

What alumni prized most was not content delivered to them, but connection and access. This carries a strategic implication: the programme's most valued asset is the network it creates, which means sustaining and growing that network is not a peripheral co-benefit but the core of the offer.



NewGen renewable accelerator, winners

Figure 7. **In their own words**

"Countries want to help each other move forward on this; the question is how we can do that despite the constraints."

"Being able to represent youth in a space full of energy professionals."

"International and cross-generational collaboration for transnational challenges."

"I can be the change I want to see in the world."

"Youth inclusion in the green transition is paramount."

"My IRENA experience launched me into the world of international development co-operation."

6.2 WHAT ALUMNI WANT NEXT

The survey's most valuable contribution is a clear, community-authored agenda for 2026–2030. Five themes recur.

A YEAR-ROUND ECOSYSTEM

Regional hubs, mentorship circles, thematic working groups and one unified platform. "One yearly forum isn't enough, we need ongoing support to build movements in our countries."

PATHWAYS TO REAL OPPORTUNITY

"Clearer bridges into internships, research roles, and early-career placements" structured roles in IRENA-linked projects, and real pilot projects with partners.

ACCESS TO FINANCE

More funding for clean-energy projects developed by young people, and seed capital or grants for founders, with due diligence before any investment.

DEEPER TECHNICAL CAPACITY

Dedicated technical tracks, specialist teach-ins, innovation sprints and hands-on sessions on emerging areas such as artificial intelligence and energy.

GREATER SCALE, WITH THE GLOBAL SOUTH AT THE CENTRE

Reach more young people, "especially African youth", and forge more partnerships across the Global South. This is the demand signal of Chapter 2, restated by the community itself.

6.3 A COMMUNITY READY TO GIVE BACK

Perhaps the most encouraging finding is that alumni do not simply want more from IRENA, they want to give. Asked how they would like to stay involved, the most popular choices were speaking at IRENA events, joining an alumni advisory group, mentoring future cohorts, and contributing to research, publications and policy briefs. The network IRENA has built is not only a group of beneficiaries; it is a standing pool of mentors, advisers, speakers and ambassadors, ready to be mobilised.

Two messages emerge, and they fit together. The programme's greatest value, alumni say, is the community and access it creates. And the community's clearest ask is to make that permanent, with real pathways into roles and projects, access to finance, deeper technical depth and wider reach.



Jakobina Junias - Co-founder of Amperra, Namibia; IRENA NewGen Accelerator alumna

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IRENA YOUTH IMPACT REPORT 2020–2026
THREE CONVICTIONS

The previous chapters have presented evidence. This chapter draws conclusions, three convictions that should shape how IRENA members and partners choose to invest from now on.

01
A CORNERSTONE, NOT A COURTESY

03
INNOVATION NEEDS BRAVE CAPITAL

04
THE NEXT DECADE WILL RUN ON DEEP TECHNOLOGY

7.1 YOUTH INNOVATION IS A CORNERSTONE, NOT A COURTESY

Youth engagement is too often treated as a gesture, a box to be ticked, a nod to the generation that will inherit the problem. The evidence for demand says differently. Demand for what IRENA offers runs at roughly 60 000 applications a year. The output is tangible: more than 60 start-ups launched or accelerated across every continent. The return compounds, with a conservative floor of almost 1 900 people trained or mentored by just 39 alumni. And the individuals are already consequential, building companies, advising ministries, and writing the tools by which countries track their climate commitments. Youth innovation belongs at the core of energy strategy, resourced as infrastructure, not as outreach.

7.2 INNOVATION NEEDS BRAVE CAPITAL

When IRENA asked its alumni what would make the greatest difference, the most consistent answer was not recognition. It was resources: seed capital, grants, pilot funding, introductions, and real roles. One founder asked simply for “a small cheque of seed capital… that can help them kick things off”; another, for IRENA to open doors, “introductions to ministries, operators and authorities, and visibility at the Assembly and COP.” The message beneath the requests is bluntly true: risk-free opportunity does not exist. Someone must take the early bet on an unproven young founder before the market will. Given early credibility and access, Renergia went on to raise more than EUR 2.5 million, Cassetex is raising USD 2 million, and GeoArc Renew secured its first USD 120 000. None of that capital would have been as reachable without an institution willing to back these founders first, which is precisely what a catalytic model does: a modest, early, high-conviction investment that de-risks a venture enough for others to follow.

7.3 THE NEXT DECADE WILL RUN ON DEEP TECHNOLOGY

The first phase of the energy transition was largely a deployment story: proven technologies rolled out at steadily falling costs, to the point where the great majority of new renewable power capacity is now cheaper than fossil-fuel alternatives, and battery-storage costs have fallen by more than 90% since 2010. The next phase is harder. Integrating variable renewables, managing demand, siting infrastructure in difficult places and digitalising the grid to run on deep technology: artificial intelligence, big data, geospatial analysis and advanced storage.

The young innovators in this report are already working at that frontier. Renergia applies AI to energy management; Climind automates climate and ESG data; FortyGuard has built a new class of temperature-focused AI models; GeoArc Renew uses geospatial analysis to site renewables in fragile regions; Treeva is engineering novel generation for transport corridors.

Young people are not merely comfortable with these tools, they are native to them, close to the research frontier and unburdened by legacy assumptions. IRENA's own flagship gathering has recognised the shift, turning its 2026 Youth Forum to artificial intelligence and digitalisation.

> The three convictions converge on a single implication. Youth innovation is a cornerstone of the energy transition; it needs brave capital to reach its potential; and it is the key to the deep-technology decade now beginning. Together they make the case not for maintaining this work at its current scale, but for expanding it.



IRENA Youth delegates visiting the world's tallest CSP tower, Dubai, UAE, 2026

8

IRENA YOUTH IMPACT REPORT 2020–2026
THE ROAD AHEAD, 2026–2030

The evidence presented here leads to one conclusion: the case is not to sustain IRENA's work with young people at its current scale, but to expand it. This section sets out the ambition for 2026–2030 and the concrete ways in which IRENA members and partners can help realise it.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Rarely does an investment case combine proven results, extraordinary efficiency and unmet demand as clearly as this one. Because the model is proven and its unit cost is so low, additional resources translate almost directly into additional impact. At the programme's demonstrated cost-efficiency, every further USD 100 000 would reach approximately 125 young people directly, and, through the multiplier, many times that number in their communities. Few investments in the energy transition offer so much reach per dollar, or rest on so clear a signal of demand.

SIX PRIORITIES FOR 2026–2030

Figure 8. **The 2026–2030 ambition at a glance**

SCALE THE REACH

Several thousand more young people directly by 2030, with continued priority for LDCs, SIDS and, as alumni urged, African youth.

A YEAR-ROUND ALUMNI ECOSYSTEM

Regional hubs, mentorship circles, thematic working groups and a single unified platform for IRENA youth.

PATHWAYS INTO REAL OPPORTUNITY

Fellowships, placements, research roles and defined roles in IRENA-linked projects, so connection reliably becomes contribution.

BRAVE CAPITAL FOR YOUTH VENTURES

Seed and pilot funding, and introductions to investors and markets, with appropriate due diligence.

DEEP-TECHNOLOGY CAPACITY

Hands-on technical tracks, AI and energy, grid and storage, implementation, so youth can build the transition, not only advocate for it.

ACTIVATE ALUMNI AS AN ENGINE

Mobilise the network's offer to mentor, advise, speak and contribute, among the highest-return moves available.

HOW IRENA MEMBERS AND PARTNERS CAN HELP

The priorities above can be supported in five distinct ways, so that a contributor can choose the form that best fits its interests.

Renew and scale the core contribution. The simplest and most powerful step, widening annual intake of young people.

Sponsor a vertical. A regional accelerator cohort; a cohort of youth fellowships or placements; a seed and pilot fund for young ventures; the year-round alumni platform; or a technical capacity track such as AI and energy. Each is a defined commitment with a measurable result.

Co-fund alongside the UAE. IRENA members, foundations and companies are invited to join as co-contributors, pooling resources behind a proven programme rather than building one from scratch.

Contribution in kind. Universities can offer faculty and curricula; companies can offer mentors, site visits and internships; investors can offer diligence and capital networks.

Open doors. At no financial cost, open pipelines for alumni – internships, placements, policy roles and market access. The alumni told us this matters most.

A MODEL OTHERS CAN JOIN

None of what this report documents would exist without the Voluntary Contribution to IRENA's work with young people. The Government of the United Arab Emirates funded the whole of this portfolio, for approximately USD 1.2 million, and with a return in enterprises founded, careers launched, policies shaped and communities reached that could not have been forecast at the outset. The UAE's contribution built the foundation and proved the concept. What the next phase needs is for more partners to build on it.

9 IRENA YOUTH IMPACT REPORT 2020–2026
WORK UNDERWAY

The results in this report cover 2020–2026. Several initiatives are still under way and are not yet reflected in the figures reported. This section records where each stands, so that readers have a complete picture of the portfolio as it moves into its next phase. Results will be reported in full in the next edition.

6
regional NewGen hackathons

19
startups in the fourth NewGen Accelerator cohort, from around 130 applicants

55 000+
applications to the IRENA Youth Forum 2027

2026–2028
term of the newly elected IRENA Youth Council

9.1 IRENA NEWGEN HACKATHON: A REGIONAL SERIES

Launched as part of the NewGen portfolio, the IRENA NewGen Hackathon takes the accelerator model to regions, bringing young innovators together to develop solutions to local energy transition challenges. Each edition is co-delivered with a youth-led regional partner, extending IRENA's reach through organisations already embedded in their communities.

The table below highlights the NewGen Hackathon progress throughout the year.

Table 2. **IRENA NewGen Hackathon regional series**

Region	Partner	Location and timing	Status
Latin America	Student Energy	Manaus, Brazil, 2026	Delivered 22 participants
Africa	Green Africa Youth Organization (GAYO)	Accra, Ghana, 2026	Delivered 34 participants
Southeast Asia	Youth for Energy Southeast Asia (Y4SEA)	Manila, Philippines, October 2026	Delivered 43 participants
Europe	European Youth Energy Network (EYEN)	Nice, France, October 2026	Delivered 22 Participants
North, Central and West Asia	North China Electric Power University (NCEPU)	Beijing, China, November 2026	Delivered 78 participants
Middle East	To be confirmed	Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, December 2026	Scheduled

9.2 IRENA NEWGEN ACCELERATOR: THE FOURTH COHORT

The NewGen Renewable Energy Accelerator ran for its fourth consecutive year in 2026. Around 130 startups applied, and 19 of the strongest were selected across the energy transition, clean technology and climate technology. Between June and September 2026, the cohort took part in a programme of workshops, webinars, investor and partner matchmaking, and targeted capacity building.

All 19 startups then competed in the IRENA NewGen Rising Star virtual semi-finals. The four top-performing ventures will be invited to the United Arab Emirates for an entrepreneurship event, joining the growing group of NewGen founders described in this report.



IRENA NewGen Accelerator 2026 cohort, Rising Star semi-final

9.3 A NEW IRENA YOUTH COUNCIL, 2026–2028

A new IRENA Youth Council has been selected through a competitive global call to serve from 2026 to 2028. Co-chaired by IRENA 's Director-General, it brings together leading youth-led organisations and individual young leaders, including policy makers, entrepreneurs and energy specialists from all regions, chosen with careful attention to gender and geographical balance. As set out in section 4, the Council's handover from one cohort to the next is what allows youth participation in IRENA's work to continue independently of any single generation of alumni.

Figure 9. **IRENA Youth Council, 2026–2028**



Ahmed Mahmoud

Egypt/United States

Founder and Chief Executive Officer of NEXERA, an energy intelligence platform for energy access across the Global South. UNIDO Clean Tech Expert and the first United States Fellow of the Nasser Fellowship for International Leadership.



Ana Maria Ramirez Tovar

Colombia

Sustainability Director of Blumergy and Senior Guest Researcher at Technische Universität Berlin. Has advised Colombia's Ministry of Mines and Energy and UPME, and supported the design of the national regulatory framework for energy communities.



Andrea Balcazar Gonzalez

Mexico • Student Energy

Programme Manager at Student Energy, developing international programmes on youth engagement, sustainability and the energy transition. Sustainable Development Engineer, Tecnológico de Monterrey; 2021 Mujer Tec Award (Environment).



Darina Elizarova

Russia • BRICS Youth Energy Agency

Works in international co-operation in the nuclear energy sector and co-ordinates educational programmes at the BRICS Youth Energy Agency. Master's degree in Climate Change and Carbon Regulation, MGIMO University.



Eloisa Cristina Silva Fernandez

Brazil

Adviser on green Industry and decarbonisation at the Latin American Observatory on Energy Geopolitics (OLAGE) and Junior Technical Adviser at GIZ Brazil. Executive Committee member of the UNECE Youth Group on Resilient Energy Systems.



Genesis Alfred

Saint Lucia • Caribbean Climate Justice

Program Manager at the Caribbean Climate Justice Project and the Youth IRIE programme, and U-Report OECS Lead Ambassador for Saint Lucia. Has represented Saint Lucia at regional and international fora on the just energy transitions.



Inutu Katoti

Zambia

Renewable energy engineer and founder of Ziva Energy Services, working on rural electrification and infrastructure data for electrification planning. Formerly with UNDP Angola; MSc, University of Leeds; former IRENA I-ACT Peer Educator.



Josh Oxby

United Kingdom • IEEE PES Young Professionals

Senior Energy Systems Specialist at Scottish Power and member of the UN SDG7 Technical Advisory Group. Former UN Secretary-General's Global Youth Focal Point for SDG7 and Co-Chair of the IRENA Youth Council (2025-2026).



Kenneth Jong

Malaysia • Youth for Energy Southeast Asia (Y4SEA)

Senior Outreach and Collaboration Officer at Y4SEA and member of the UNIDO Energy and Climate Action Youth Advisory Group. Works in an economics and commercial role in the energy sector in Kuala Lumpur.



Kosta Peev

North Macedonia

Mechanical engineer and energy consultant specialising in decentralised smart energy systems, solar energy and energy efficiency. Youth delegate at the 2025 IRENA Youth Forum, I-ACT Peer Educator and World Energy Council Future Energy Leader.



Max Haizmann

Germany • European Youth Energy Network (EYEN)

Energy markets professional and researcher whose work includes renewable hydrogen pricing and Europe-MENA hydrogen trade. Vice-President of EYEN, strengthening youth participation in energy policy.



Rapheal Teye

Ghana • Green Africa Youth Organization (GAYO)

Energy Co-ordinator at GAYO, leading its energy portfolio across energy access and clean cooking, with over five years of experience. Co-ordinated the IRENA NewGen Hackathon, Africa edition.



Sarra Mansour

Algeria • SDG7 Youth Constituency

Global Focal Point of the SDG7 Youth Constituency of the UN Major Group for Children and Youth (2026–2028) and AU-UNDP Fellow at UNDP Togo. Chevening Scholar at University College London.



Sicily (Yuhan) Zheng

China

Executive assistant to the CEO of the Nobel Sustainability Trust and PhD candidate at the National University of Ireland, researching energy innovation governance. Chairs the IEEE Young Professionals Climate and Sustainability Subcommittee.

Note: Members listed alphabetically by first name; affiliations show the seat held on the Council

9.4 IRENA YOUTH FORUM 2027: DEMAND REAFFIRMED

Applications for the IRENA Youth Forum 2027 have now closed, with more than 55 000 received by the end of October 2026, thus confirming the demand highlighted in section 2. Selection will take place in the coming months, applying the same priorities that have guided the portfolio from the outset: gender parity and strong representation from least-developed countries, small island developing states and the Global South.

9.5 YOUTH ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE

IRENA will continue to carry young voices into the processes that shape the energy transition. Youth side events took place at COP31 in Türkiye, and an approved youth event will take place at the UN 2026 Water Conference in Abu Dhabi in December 2026, extending the portfolio's engagement to the links between energy and water.

> Together, these initiatives show a portfolio that continues to grow in reach, partnership and ambition, and a demand that continues to outpace capacity. These are the foundations upon which the priorities of the programme will be built.



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