
Sixteenth session of the Assembly

Abu Dhabi, 11-12 January 2026

Background Note

High-Level Dialogue on Reimagining Energy Futures: Bold Visions for Shared Prosperity

1. The energy sector has changed significantly over the past two decades. Renewable energy is expanding rapidly as costs continue to drop, though progress on energy access remains uneven. Since 2010, global installed capacity has grown from 1.2 TW to 4.4 TW, with wind power growing more than 6-fold and solar PV achieving a remarkable 46-fold increase. Deployment has also produced socio-economic benefits such as employment gains, with 16.2 million jobs in the renewable sector in 2023. It also provided 155 million people with access to off-grid renewables technologies, many of whom live in underserved communities.
2. Despite the achievements to date, the promise of just energy transitions has not been fully realised. Ownership of energy assets is unevenly distributed and significant geographic disparities exist in terms of deployment and the socio-economic benefits that flow from them. Affordable and reliable energy services continue to be out of reach for hundreds of millions of people in developing and developed countries. Financing and opportunities largely fail to reach those most in need, as those with the least amount of influence frequently struggle to have their voices heard in both national and international decision-making.
3. Much greater efforts are needed especially to realise Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 7. Under the goal, countries committed to ensuring universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services, increasing substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix, doubling the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency, enhancing international cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research and technology and enhancing international cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research and technology by 2030. While progress has been made across targets, much remains to be done.
4. The policies and pathways chosen by decision-makers not only influence the speed and scale of the transition, and the way in which benefits and burdens are distributed. In a complex world, policymakers seek to accomplish a range of objectives, from providing affordable energy to their citizens to powering development, ensuring energy security and reducing the environmental impacts of energy sources, including climate change, air pollution and soil degradation. Identifying synergies and fairly balancing trade-offs is key.

5. Past experiences have shown that clear visions for change are needed to provide the direction and ambition necessary to overcome deep-rooted structural, economic, and social barriers to transforming energy systems. Bold visions, inspired leadership, and concerted action are central to deliver on the priorities that serve the public interest: well-being and sustainable prosperity for present and future generations within planetary limits. In this context, systems thinking and drawing on a wide range of perspectives and voices can help inform and inspire policy making.
6. There is no single blueprint that fits all. Effective policies and approaches must be tailored across countries and regions depending on the local context. This tailoring involves navigating the complex dynamics that unfold among different stakeholders, including the role that governments, businesses, communities, and others take in guiding and shaping the energy transition. Mutual learning, collaboration and international cooperation will be essential for charting the path to a more sustainable energy future.

Objectives of the session

7. As the international energy community gathers in Abu Dhabi under the theme “Powering Humanity: Renewable Energy for Shared Prosperity”, this High-level Dialogue will serve to articulate positive collective visions for the energy systems of the future and build momentum for accelerating global renewable energy deployment.
8. Within this context, IRENA Members and global stakeholders will consider how the energy transition can fully realise its potential, by promoting truly inclusive development, structural transformation, and long-term resilience in both developing and developed contexts. The High-level Dialogue will also seek to identify priority areas for international cooperation to accelerate progress on SDG7 for 2030 and ensuring a just energy transition.

Guiding questions

- What structural obstacles need to be overcome to accelerate the energy transition at the scale required and what policy solutions, governance mechanisms and financing strategies do you consider particularly promising?
- Which shared values and multi-stakeholder coalitions can help find common ground to support collective action on equitable energy transitions?
- What international cooperation priorities do you see for just energy transitions in the coming years that can help share transition-related benefit more equitably and what role do you see for IRENA in this context?
- What lessons can be derived from national just energy transition efforts - including realising SDG7 – that may provide helpful insights for others?

Associated Publications

- [Delivering on the UAE Consensus: Tracking progress toward tripling renewable energy capacity and doubling energy efficiency by 2030 \(2025\)](#)
- [Tracking SDG 7: The energy progress report \(2025\)](#)
- [Global landscape of energy transition finance \(2025\)](#)
- Fostering Just and Inclusive Energy Transitions: A Framework for Policy Design and Assessment (2025, forthcoming)
- Renewable energy jobs: Annual review (2025, forthcoming)