

**Key Highlights**

[enb.iisd.org/energy/vef2021](http://enb.iisd.org/energy/vef2021)

- The Vienna Energy Forum 2021 held its first ever Youth Forum that focused on bringing youth, experts and ministers together to advance an inclusive sustainable energy sector.
- The Forum created a space for youth and entry level professionals to gain knowledge towards advancing their skills, creating an enabling environment for the energy transition and engaging with policy makers on their role in policy making.
- Individuals from around the world let their voices be heard and advocated for greater representation in the renewable energy revolution.

The Vienna Energy Forum 2021 (VEF) formally opened with its first-ever Youth Day hosted in partnership with the SDG7 Youth Constituency. The Youth Forum (Youth for VEF) is the event's first ever youth-focused initiative "organized by youth for youth." It was a notably international crowd with youth, experts and practitioners across Europe, Africa, the Americas, and Asia gathering online to debate and explore the advancement of an inclusive and sustainable energy revolution.

The Forum held a "Meet the Expert" session where youth could dialogue with experts, entrepreneurs, IGO officials, and researchers, simultaneously expanding their networks while sharing their questions and observations.

In addition, four Skills Academy Workshops aimed to provide youth guidelines and tips on energy-related topics. They included the energy transition, the net-zero goal, energy efficiency policies, and women-focused financing for sustainable energy initiatives. Experts such as Jefferey Sachs, President of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, advocated for having a holistic approach to the energy transition, insisting on government action and encouraging more advanced conversations on financing.

**Future-Proof Skills**

In a panel discussion between experts and youth representatives, panelists tackled issues at the intersection of employment and education, including entry-level opportunities and employment and skills gaps in the clean energy industry, and re-skilling for a just energy transition. In all discussions, special attention

was paid to the gender dimensions of jobs and schooling.

Panelists proposed a rethink of the school curricula and underscored the importance of adaptable exploratory learning for children, which allows for creative thinking in a continually changing labor market. A panelist noted that international double-degree masters programs are vital for a global clean energy transition as they cover the skills and capacities needed in energy planning.

On the topic of encouraging women graduates towards energy-related career paths, panelists stressed the importance of mentorship. They shared examples in India and across Africa of women entrepreneurship benefitting from deliberate gender mainstreaming initiatives.

Another panelist said entry level- graduates should gain field experience in the energy sector and knowledge about energy transitions to smoothly transition into the job market through paid internships or fellowships. She also noted that young graduates are searching for meaningful career paths through employment opportunities in enterprises whose values align with theirs. Others concurred and advised that companies use appropriate job descriptions to market themselves and their values.

**Youth and Policy Maker Debate**

In a ministerial segment, youth and government representatives from Austria and the Dominican Republic gathered online to discuss the role of youth in the energy transition, and present and future policies and initiatives to boost youth engagement and support an

enabling environment for inclusive structural transformation.

Milagros de Campos, Minister of International Cooperation, Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, Dominican Republic, noted her country is on the path to creating forums like the VEF for youth to participate with policy makers at the national level. She added that her government is focusing on education programs recognizing that youth are effective “change agents” toward an energy transition. She also encouraged youth to attend public hearings and to contact local representatives to have a voice and participate in policy making.

In response, the youth representative from the Dominican Republic advocated for a more inclusive and equitable dialogue that accounts for intersectional identities to facilitate structural transformation in the energy sector. Also, he advocated for spaces where youth can actively shape public policy.

Jürgen Schneider, Director General, Climate Action and Energy Directorate-General, Federal Ministry Republic, Austria, said that energy transition is societal challenge and, as such, it is not a task for governments alone but for society at large, including youth. For structural change to happen, a broader pool of talent must be tapped, including women, migrants, people with disabilities, and youth, he stated. This why STEM education and re-skilling is being promoted by the government, he added. The current Austrian committee on climate change does not include youth, he acknowledged, but he noted a governance reform is underway, including the establishment of a youth panel. He indicated that while an energy transition poses many challenges, it also offers opportunities for job creation and economic prosperity, which is why the Austrian pandemic recovery package includes the expansion of renewable energy sources for the next decade and funding for technological innovation and education in this field.

The youth representative from Austria commended the Renewable Expansion Law but highlighted other needs for a green recovery that include a fairer accounting of electricity consumption, implementing carbon pricing and encouraging a gender-inclusive energy industry. Also, he highlighted that paid internships on climate change and energy issues expand opportunities for youth and proposed a citizen council to increase youth engagement in sustainable energy and bridge the gap between energy ambitions and actions.

## Enabling Environment

Panelists gathered to discuss how to create an enabling environment for youth and female involvement in the energy transition with targeted legislation, policies, programs, and projects.

Sherry Kennedy, Director of Communications, SEforAll, called for supporting women mentorships and exploiting the role of government to incentivize greater inclusion in ecosystems. For early-stage startups, she encouraged learning soft skills, such as project design, preparation, analysis and presentation, to foster investor confidence and create a more fertile ground for financing. She also encouraged young entrepreneurs to build their networks locally and understand their landscape.

To help young startups, Ujunwa Ojemini, Private Financing Advisory Network (PFAN) Advisor, advocated for greater support in project development, early-stage funding in the form of grants and equity and flexibility when assessing the products of young entrepreneurs. To address difficulties in raising business capital, she encouraged networks to connect entrepreneurs with financiers that are gender-aligned to increase inclusiveness.

Kakembo Galabuzi Brian, Founder and Executive Director of WEYE Clean Energy Company Ltd., heralded the benefits of engaging with youth organizations such as Student Energy that help advance the clean energy agenda in multilateral organizations and negotiations. Through these organizations, he added, youth and women have greater access to knowledge, projects, and networks, and young entrepreneurs who otherwise do not have a track record or collateral can build trust in their dedication and creativity and develop networks that vouch for them. He encouraged a “larger conversation” on the processes of building inclusion.

Jari Aaltonen, Manager, Barbados CleanTech Cluster – BLOOM, emphasized the role of government funding in incubation projects that enable public sector and local commerce support for clean energy startups involving young entrepreneurs. He also called for greater investment in “building ecosystems” that bring together government, private sector, universities, and others to support development in renewable energy.