

Summary
COVID-19 and beyond: Impact on the renewable energy sector
Webinar for IRENA Coalition for Action members
Tuesday 7 April, 2pm – 3:30 pm CEST

The wide-ranging consequences of COVID-19 call for a massive mobilisation of global resources. The crisis also highlights the interlinkages between efforts needed in support of the decarbonisation of societies and broader social and economic policies required for a just and inclusive transition. In a webinar convened by IRENA for the IRENA Coalition for Action (“the Coalition”), over 40 Coalition member organisations representing the private sector, civil society and other stakeholder groups discussed the immediate and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on renewable energy and exchanged perspectives on what actions are now needed for an inclusive, low-carbon economy.

Introductory and Concluding Remarks

- Francesco La Camera, Director-General, IRENA

Moderators

- Ben Backwell, CEO, Global Wind Energy Council
- Rabia Ferroukhi, Director, Knowledge, Policy and Finance Centre, IRENA

Lead Discussants

- Alfredo Parres, Group Senior Vice President, ABB
- Silvia Piana, Head of Regulatory Affairs for Africa, Asia and Oceania, Enel Green Power
- Eco Matser, Senior Programme Manager, Climate, Energy and Development Cooperation, Hivos
- Marta Martinez Sanchez, Energy Policies and Climate Change, Iberdrola
- Eddie Rich, CEO, International Hydropower Association
- Rana Adib, Executive Secretary, REN21
- Tomas Kåberger, Executive Board Chair, Renewable Energy Institute
- Terry Chen, Head of Overseas Storage & DG Solutions Business, Trina Solar
- Rina Bohle Zeller, Senior Specialist, Global Public Affairs, Vestas
- Jesse Fahnestock, Global Lead Energy Transition, WWF International

Key highlights

During the course of the webinar, participants identified the following key considerations:

- **COVID-19 has had immediate and significant impacts on the renewable energy sector and the deployment of renewables:** Participants noted that the industry is facing challenges meeting project deadlines due to the impact of COVID-19 on the labour force and pressures on global supply chains. Smaller renewable energy companies are particularly vulnerable to the ongoing disruption of the sector. In this regard and to protect the renewable energy industry, several participants highlighted that they are taking protective measures to safeguard their supply chains and workforce. Participants shared revised growth forecasts for renewable energy, highlighting that different segments of the renewable energy sector are being impacted differently by the crisis. Concerns were also expressed over the uncertain long-term outlook for the renewable energy sector due to COVID-19. Finally, the resiliency of

existing electrical grid infrastructure will be tested by the crisis with major shifts in load profiles and renewables making up a larger percentage of total generation.

- **Renewable energy can play a key role in the immediate battle against COVID-19:** Access to reliable and sustainable energy is a crucial need at all times, which becomes even more important for supporting essential services during a global crisis. Currently an estimated 500 million people are serviced by health facilities that lack access to electricity. Participants noted that hybrid renewable energy solutions, which can be deployed in a wide range of environmental and socio-economic conditions, could play an important role in supporting efforts against COVID-19 by providing energy access to critical infrastructure such as hospitals and enabling rural and remote areas to gain timely access to medical care.
- **As governments consider stimulus measures to boost post-COVID-19 economic recovery, renewable energy actors should speak with one voice advocating for the social and economic value of renewable energy:** Participants raised concerns that falling oil prices affecting traditional energy industries may encourage governments to provide substantial support towards these vested interests. Participants also observed that these legacy industries continue to have more direct links to key decision-makers. To effectively advocate for renewable energy measures supporting a just energy transition, the renewable energy sector will need to work together and mobilise around a unified message. Such a message should emphasise the net benefits renewable energy confers to society and the high contribution to rapid and sustained economic recovery, including local value, jobs, resiliency of supply, and other socio-economic benefits.
- **Stimulus packages and policies should address short-term challenges facing the renewable energy sector as well as the longer-term structural shift towards a low-carbon economy:** In their economic stimulus packages, governments should include measures to mitigate the short-term impacts of COVID-19 on the renewable energy sector; for example, extending timelines for contractually obligated delivery of projects in the near-term and making special allowances to qualify for government-backed financial incentives. Governments may also consider putting in place additional direct support schemes in favour of renewable energy deployment, thereby providing a clear signal that they are committed to a low-carbon economy. Furthermore, governments should allow for targeted infrastructure investments to support increased renewable energy adoption and accelerate efforts towards tackling major decarbonisation challenges in the heating/cooling and transport sectors. These should include investments in grid enhancements, interconnections and storage and flexibility solutions as these are key enablers for the accelerated deployment of renewables. Most importantly, to support the longer-term structural shift towards a low-carbon economy and fully realise the socio-economic benefits of the energy transition, governments will need to support their people and economies by pursuing appropriate policies in areas such as education and training, labour market policy, industrial policy, and domestic and regional supply chains.
- **In designing stimulus measures to support renewable energy, governments must consider COVID-19's disproportionate impacts on disadvantaged communities:** The COVID-19 crisis threatens to disproportionately impact developing countries. In addition to being linked to health, energy access is also closely associated with other development indicators such as food security and poverty reduction. Participants emphasised that governments should dedicate resources to supporting the decentralised renewable energy sector, which plays a critical role in enabling access to electricity and clean cooking technologies for those living in rural and remote areas.

- **Governments cannot abandon their climate change commitments in the midst of the pandemic:** As COVID-19 impacts the globe, the climate emergency continues to accelerate and government actions brought forward in response to the crisis should support commitments made under the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In addition to implementing previously-announced climate policies, governments now have a rare opportunity to make transformational investments in low-carbon technologies and infrastructure through COVID-19 economic stimulus packages. Participants also emphasised the need to work with governments to ensure their economic stimulus packages are integrated with their Nationally Determined Contributions.

Next steps

In a survey following the webinar, Coalition members expressed their support for putting forward a joint Coalition for Action Statement on COVID-19. Coalition members also indicated interest in having additional Coalition for Action webinar/s as the pandemic continues to evolve.