

Concept Note

Energy Transition and the 2030 Agenda: An UNRISD–IISD–GEN Panel Discussion

9 May 2017 • 12:30–14:00 • Room XI • Palais des Nations, Geneva

From 12:00, join us for light refreshments and a chance to chat with local actors and experts involved in the energy transition.

With the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, governments have committed to an ambitious vision that aims to transform our world. SDG 7 holds the promise of access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all, with a substantial increase in the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix. The Paris Agreement reached at the UN Climate Change Conference in 2015 (COP21) was a turning point on a net zero-greenhouse gas, climate-resilient and sustainable development path.

What are these commitments likely to translate to, in practice? What will it take to turn the vision into reality? Global energy systems, and the economies and societies within which they function, will have to undergo significant transformation in many domains to produce energy sustainably, change consumption patterns and enhance energy efficiency. Energy transition is necessary not only to meet rapidly rising energy demands, but also to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, mitigate climate change, and reduce the adverse environmental impacts of the extraction and use of fossil-based energy. Energy transition is a requirement to achieve the social, environmental and economic objectives inherent in the concept of sustainable development.

At this panel discussion, speakers will explore the implications of the energy transition from a range of perspectives—from the technological and environmental, to the social, economic and political. The aim of the event is to stimulate a debate on how to get the energy transition “right”.

Although energy transition is enshrined in the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on climate change, there is no clear-cut definition of it. Different interpretations of “modern and sustainable energy” lead some countries to include nuclear power and some fossil energy sources in their longer term development planning, while the most ambitious (Denmark) envisages being “fossil-free” by mid-century.

The lines in the debate are also far from clear-cut. Expanding renewable energy sources is a key component of low-carbon development, and it is happening at accelerating speed as renewables become more reliable and cost-competitive. But influential actors, such as conventional power producers and their lobbyists, refute claims about reliability and argue that renewables will be incompatible with existing grid infrastructures and lead to job losses. The ILO, on the other hand, expects that, once established, renewable energy technologies [will provide more jobs](#) than conventional energy production does now. Even civil society is divided on the topic. Some environmental activists oppose wind power because of bird/bat strikes and the visual effect of turbines on the landscape; or they oppose hydropower because of negative impacts on the local environment and hydrology. Other activists, however, are precisely the ones driving the transition to renewable energy.

Peter Wooders (IISD) will kick off with a presentation on what the energy transition is. Marek Harsdorff (ILO), will then speak about the employment and job implications of energy transition. Dunja Krause (UNRISD) will look at energy transition through an eco-social lens, considering social barriers and opportunities as well as policy responses, drawing on the analysis and recommendations in the UNRISD Flagship Report, [Policy Innovations for Transformative Change](#). From a local perspective, Matthias Rüetschi will present energy transition projects Services Industriels de Genève (SIG) are currently investing in. Nora Kronig Romero (Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN) will deliver closing remarks.