How Young People Are Shaping Europe's Energy Future

From policy corridors in Brussels to energy cooperatives in rural Greece, young Europeans are proving they're not waiting for permission to lead the energy transition. Here are the stories from 2025 that show youth are already driving change.

When 30-year-old Federico Barbieri and Carlotta Ferri were invited as youth delegates to the 2019 Clean Energy Ministerial in Canada, they discovered something frustrating: youth had been invited to the event, but not to the actual decision-making rooms. Those doors remained closed.

They returned to Brussels, sat outside the European Commission building with post-it notes, and started sketching ideas. Few years later, the organization they founded, the European Youth Energy Network (EYEN), has become one of the most influential youth voices in European energy policy, working directly with the European Commission, IRENA, and national governments across the continent.

The Numbers Tell a Story

2025 has been a breakthrough year for youth engagement in Europe's energy sector. The European Commission's Young Energy Ambassadors programme received over **1,300 applications** for just 30 positions, a record that signals unprecedented youth interest in shaping energy policy. In February 2025, Commissioner for Energy and Housing Dan Jørgensen held his first Youth Policy Dialogue, where the 2024-2025 cohort of Young Energy Ambassadors presented 12 concrete policy recommendations directly to EU leadership.

But the real story isn't in Brussels. It's happening across Europe, in communities where young people are building the energy transition from the ground up.

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Greece: Making Energy Communities Accessible

In Athens, the **Electra Energy Cooperative** has become a model for youth-inclusive energy community development. While not exclusively focused on young people, the cooperative has seen **high youth participation** driven by climate concerns and a desire for practical action.

The challenge? Initial investments ranging from €1,500 to €3,500 create significant barriers for young people who often earn modest incomes and live in rented housing. Yet young Greeks are finding ways through, leveraging cooperative models, seeking grant funding, and pooling resources. As documented by EYEN's Young Energy Consumers Task Force, these initiatives demonstrate that when financial barriers are addressed, youth engagement in energy communities surges.

Poland: Cooperative Innovation Meets Regulatory Reality

In Poland, the **CoopTech Hub** cooperative startup is helping establish energy communities by providing regulatory guidance and business model support. Young professionals are using their tech skills to navigate complex Polish energy regulations and create frameworks that make community energy accessible to ordinary citizens.

The initiative represents a distinctly youth-driven approach: using digital tools, startup methodologies, and peer-to-peer learning to democratize energy knowledge. However, restrictive national policies still make it difficult for young people to participate fully, as many Polish energy cooperatives are limited to serving only their own members, a regulatory barrier that young activists are now working to change.

North Macedonia: €2 Million Saved Through Youth Innovation

At MAKSTIL steelworks in Skopje, two Energy Scouts, **Eleonora Jovanovska and Tijana Shaleva**, achieved something remarkable in 2025. Through the Young Energy Europe programme, they identified potential to optimize the electric arc furnace by implementing an Eccentric Bottom Tapping (EBT) system.

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The results: **12 GWh of electricity saved annually**, **6,700 tons of CO2 emissions cut**, and approximately **€2 million saved per year** in operational costs, with an investment payback period of just 2.58 years.

Their achievement is part of a broader trend across Central and Eastern Europe. The Young Energy Europe project has trained specialists in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, and North Macedonia to become Energy Scouts, young professionals who identify and implement energy efficiency projects in their companies using bottom-up approaches.

Over 70 innovative best-practice approaches have been collected across Europe, proving that climate protection is not just ethical, it's economically smart.

Brussels: From Excluded to Essential

Perhaps the most significant shift in 2025 has been institutional. The European Commission didn't just listen to young people, it created structures to ensure their voices shape policy.

In June 2025, **60 Young Energy Ambassadors** attended the European Sustainable Energy Week (EUSEW), contributing to policy discussions and co-shaping youth activities. The 2025 edition included critical sessions on urban sustainability and greenwashing, topics identified by young people as priorities that older generations often overlook or downplay.

Starting in 2025, Young Energy Ambassadors participate in a **mentorship programme with energy experts** in the Commission's Directorate-General for Energy. This isn't tokenistic engagement, it's systematic integration of youth perspectives into EU energy policymaking.

The message from Commissioner Jørgensen is clear: "We can't achieve the energy transition without youth. They're not just stakeholders, they're co-creators."

The Invisible Barrier: Financial Exclusion

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Yet behind these success stories lies a persistent problem. As EYEN's research published in March 2025 reveals, youth are **not officially recognized as a vulnerable consumer group** in EU energy policy, despite being disproportionately affected by energy poverty.

Young people often:

- Earn modest incomes while living in rented housing that lacks energy efficiency measures
- Face financial thresholds (€1,500-€3,500) to join energy communities, barriers that exclude them from initiatives that could reduce their energy costs
- Struggle to access traditional financing sources due to lack of collateral or credit history

"We're asking young people to drive the energy transition," says Halina Jagielska, manager of EYEN's Young Energy Consumers Task Force, "while simultaneously excluding them from the very mechanisms designed to enable that transition."

October 2025: The Biggest Youth Energy Forum Yet

In October 2025, Catania, Italy hosted the fourth European Youth Energy Forum, the largest yet, with **100 outstanding youth** from across Europe and the Mediterranean selected through a competitive process.

Co-hosted with the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) and supported by Enel Foundation as Knowledge Partner, the forum focused on "From Potential to Skills: Shaping Young Professionals for the Energy Transition."

The hybrid format combined ten weekly online sessions with a five-day in-person event, allowing participants to develop concrete policy proposals on equipping young professionals with the skills necessary for a just and sustainable energy transition.

What Young People Are Demanding

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The policy recommendations presented to Commissioner Jørgensen in February 2025 are remarkably concrete:

1. **Recognize youth as a vulnerable consumer group** in energy policies
2. **Expand financial support mechanisms**: targeted subsidies, grants for young renters, easier access to energy community memberships
3. **Ensure youth representation in decision-making** at local, national, and EU levels
4. **Remove financial entry barriers** to energy communities
5. **Enhance education and outreach efforts** to equip young people with energy transition skills

These aren't aspirational asks. They're practical policy solutions based on research, lived experience, and proven models from youth-led initiatives across Europe.

Beyond Policy: The Budapest Model

In September 2025, the European Youth Centre in Budapest hosted the "Faith in Action" study session, bringing together young changemakers to explore how faith and democracy can fuel climate activism.

One highlight: visits to the **Aurora Climate Garden**, a groundbreaking agroforestry project that transformed a gravel parking lot into a thriving green space using only urban waste and volunteer power. Over five years, this youth-led initiative has become a hub for environmental education, hosting walks and workshops for schools, universities, NGOs, and corporate groups.

The project demonstrates what young people can achieve when given space, resources, and trust, not just to participate, but to lead.

The European Energy Communities Facility: €7 Million for Community Power

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Launched in September 2024 and running until February 2028, the European Energy Communities Facility is distributing **€7 million to at least 140 energy communities** to help them develop solid business plans for renewable energy projects.

The first open call was launched in June 2025, with a second planned for September 2026. While not exclusively targeting youth, the program's focus on removing financial barriers and providing capacity building directly addresses the obstacles young people face in joining energy communities.

According to the 10th State of the Energy Union report published in November 2025, **more than 8,000 energy communities** now exist across the EU, a significant increase from previous years, with youth participation growing steadily.

What Success Actually Looks Like

Marine Cornelis, executive director of Next Energy Consumer, reflects on her conversation with EYEN's leadership: "After their panel intervention at the Citizens' Energy Forum, a high-level policymaker approached them and said, 'I'd never realized that young people don't have the means to be active participants in the transition.'"

Think about that. Someone who spent years working on energy policy hadn't considered that youth might lack time, money, data, or credibility to participate in the very transition designed for their future.

This is why youth-led organizations like EYEN matter. They're not asking for permission. They're **designing their own spaces, then opening them up to others**. They're not trying to fix the existing system, they're creating new structures that work.

The Renewable Energy Jobs Boom

The economic opportunity is massive. In 2025, Europe's **photovoltaic sector is estimated to reach over 1 million workers**, up from 648,100 at the end of 2022. The European **wind industry is projected to grow from 300,000 jobs in 2022 to over 900,000 by 2030**.

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Young people are not just beneficiaries of this growth, they're driving it. From software developers creating smart grids to engineers designing more efficient renewable technologies, youth are at the forefront of clean energy innovation across Europe.

The Choice Europe Faces

Europe has reached a crossroads. We can continue treating young people as future stakeholders, inviting them to events but closing the doors to real decision-making. Or we can recognize what's already happening: **young people are already shaping Europe's energy future**, with or without institutional permission.

The question is whether institutions will catch up.

As the 2025 cohort of Young Energy Ambassadors stated in their video message to European leadership: "We're not asking you to hand us the future. We're telling you we're already building it."

The evidence from 2025 is clear: when young people are given resources, recognition, and real decision-making power, not tokenistic participation, they deliver concrete results. From €2 million in annual savings at a Macedonian steelworks to policy recommendations that shaped EU energy strategy, youth are proving they're not just passionate about change: they're competent at creating it.

Europe's energy future is already being shaped by its young people. The only question is whether Europe's institutions will be wise enough to follow their lead.

Sources:

- European Commission, Directorate-General for Energy (2025)
- European Youth Energy Network (EYEN) (2025)
- European Sustainable Energy Week (EUSEW) (2025)
- Young Energy Europe Programme (2024-2025)
- Next Energy Consumer (2025)

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- European Energy Communities Facility (2024-2028)

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