



Solar's next chapter: from growth to integration

KEY – The Energy Transition Expo returns to Rimini Expo Centre, Italy, from 10th to 12th March 2027. Organised by Italian Exhibition Group (IEG), the event brings together businesses and professionals working across the energy transition.



Solar photovoltaics remains the largest sector represented at KEY, reflecting its growing role in the energy system.

Alessandra Astolfi, Global Exhibition Director of the Green & Technology Division at Italian Exhibition Group, discusses the developments shaping solar and what visitors can expect in 2027.

PES: Solar has always been a big part of KEY. What can visitors expect to see that's new or different in 2027?

Alessandra Astolfi: Solar has always been one of KEY's pillars, and in 2027 we are strengthening it further, with an increasingly comprehensive vision of the entire value chain.

A new hall entirely dedicated to Power Distribution & Electrical Components will make its debut within the dedicated exhibition area. Technologies and systems such as transformers, switchgear cabins, generators and components are increasingly essential to making electrical infrastructure more stable and advanced, and suitable for supporting the development of renewable energy.

What really sets KEY apart is the way it brings different parts of the energy system together. Solar is not viewed as an isolated technology, but as part of an energy system undergoing transformation.

PES: There's a huge amount happening in solar at the moment. What developments are you watching most closely, and why?

AA: Solar will continue to play a central role in our energy future.

Between January and June 2026, more than 33 GW of new photovoltaic capacity was installed in the European Union, with slight growth compared with the same period in 2025. Furthermore, in June 2026, solar accounted for around 25% of EU electricity generation, becoming the largest source of electricity for the month.

What will be important for the future is to turn solar from a generation technology into an increasingly integrated component of the energy system. Continued growth in installed capacity remains fundamental, but today we must also focus on how this energy is managed, stored, distributed and used. This means paying close attention to the development of storage systems, digitalisation, smart plant management, distributed generation and the new requirements of electricity grids. At the same time, it will be important to continue working on technological innovation to increase the efficiency, reliability and competitiveness of photovoltaic solutions.

At KEY, we tell this whole story: not only what the technologies of the future will be, but how to turn them into feasible projects.

PES: We increasingly talk about solar as part of a much wider energy system, alongside storage, grids and digital technologies. How is that changing the industry?

AA: For a long time, the focus was on individual technologies. Today, we need to pay more attention to how they work together. A photovoltaic plant, for example, creates value in a different way when it is integrated with a storage system, a smart grid or digital tools capable of optimising production and consumption.

This requires new skills, new business models and greater integration across the entire value chain.

PES: Energy security has become much more important in the renewables conversation. What role can solar realistically play?

AA: Solar can make a significant contribution to energy security because it helps reduce dependence on imported energy sources.

According to SolarPower Europe's 2026 mid-year analysis, solar photovoltaics generated 282 TWh of electricity across the EU in the six months from 1st March 2026. The organisation estimates that this avoided more than €30 billion in gas imports for electricity generation, equivalent to more than €1 billion per week.

PES: One of KEY's strengths is bringing so many different parts of the energy industry together. What happens when you get all those people in the same place that perhaps wouldn't happen otherwise?

AA: KEY is not simply about giving companies and industry professionals a place to showcase their projects.

We want to bring together everyone involved in the transformation of the energy system. When technology manufacturers, developers, investors, designers, installers, institutions and researchers meet, they can share expertise, identify solutions and build relationships that might not otherwise develop. Those conversations can help turn ideas into practical projects.

PES: Could you give us a sense of the companies and industry professionals KEY 2027 will bring together, and whether the profile of exhibitors or visitors is changing?

AA: KEY brings together a very broad ecosystem of stakeholders: technology and component manufacturers, EPC contractors and financial operators, project developers, engineers, installers, designers, utilities, public administration, institutions, industry associations, the research community, start-ups and innovative SMEs.

The event's growth is also bringing greater diversification in the sectors represented by exhibitors and visitors. We are no longer talking only about operators directly involved in renewable generation, but about all those involved in and affected by the evolution of the energy system. Examples include highly energy-intensive industrial sectors and the financial sector, which must support the actual implementation of projects.

At KEY, every professional community can find its own space, while also coming into contact with complementary sectors.

PES: KEY attracts people from a growing number of international markets. How important is that international mix when it comes to sharing ideas, experience and technology?



AA: It is fundamental. The energy transition is a global process, but it is progressing at different speeds and with different characteristics across markets. Comparing experiences helps us better understand which solutions work, which models can be replicated and which need to be adapted to individual contexts.

For us, internationalisation means not only increasing the presence of foreign operators, but also building a platform where companies, institutions and professionals from different markets can meet and develop new relationships.

In 2027, this aspect will be further strengthened.

PES: And does that exchange translate into actual business? What have you seen in terms of partnerships or new opportunities developing through KEY?

AA: We have seen a steady increase in the number of international operators, buyers and delegations from abroad who see KEY as a place to meet new contacts, engage with new markets and develop partnerships.

This reflects how KEY has evolved. Business is an important part of the energy transition: investment, partnerships and industrial collaboration help solutions already available today reach other markets and be adopted more widely across international markets.

PES: What do you think will be the big talking points for the solar industry when everyone arrives in Rimini next March?

AA: One of the central topics will be integration. Discussions will therefore focus on storage, grids, flexibility, digitalisation, demand management, distributed generation and, naturally, technological innovation. There will also be a strong focus on the conditions needed to turn decarbonisation targets into investments and real projects.

PES: Finally, what would make KEY 2027 a really successful event for you and for the solar industry?

AA: For me, success means seeing KEY continue to grow, not just in size, but in the quality of the relationships, discussions and opportunities it creates.

I hope visitors leave Rimini with new knowledge and contacts, having discovered technologies, formed partnerships and identified ideas they can put to work in their own organisations.

We want KEY to remain a place where people can move beyond talking about the future of energy and begin putting plans into practice.

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Alessandra Astolfi