

Sustainable Investing Expertise by

Robeco Trends & Thematic Investing The New Energy Landscape: Creating clean joules from disruptive jolts

Investment opportunity For professional investors Roman Boner, Senior Portfolio Manager RobecoSAM Smart Energy Equities



- Renewables will be the new 'petroleum' fueling 21st century innovation and growth
- Carbon pricing, stricter regulations, favorable financing, and lower costs bolster clean and efficient energy solutions
- Beyond renewables, a successful energy transition requires investments across the entire energy value chain

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## Executive summary

The energy sector is undergoing a once-in-a-century transition to a new energy source that will require a new energy infrastructure. The Smart Energy Equities strategy invests in companies across the energy value chain that are enabling the transformation of energy towards a net zero future.

The energy sector is at a once-in-a-century crossroads. The climate crisis means 20th century energy fuels are unable to meet society's need for robust and sustainable economic growth. An energy shift is mission critical.

Shifts in energy sourcing can be destructive and disruptive, but they are also necessary and constructive. As previous energy shifts have shown, they provide powerful jolts that ignite joules of energy that stimulate innovative technologies and applications across industries. As a result, new players, industries and business models emerge that drive economic growth and increase wealth and well-being.

We have entered a new century of energy that is being shaped and propelled by 21st century forces impacting energy supply and demand: the danger of carbon emissions, the rising demand for electricity, and the promise of a dynamic, digitalized and hyper-connected economy.

The energy sector accounts for 75% of global emissions making it by far the single largest contributor to climate change and the central focus of decarbonization and climate action for governments, companies and investors.

Switching from polluting fossil fuels to renewable energy such as wind and solar is the only way forward. Moreover, the electrification of demand-side applications will enable the expansion of renewables across the entire economy.

Beyond supportive policies and financing, technological advances mean renewable energy sources are now cost competitive with traditional fuels. Solar has become the cheapest source of electricity in history and renewable capacity is expanding faster than any other type of energy.

However, there is still a long way to go. The net zero trajectory requires annual investment in clean energy to reach USD 4 trillion by 2030, more than triple current levels.

Moreover, current investments in clean energy generation will not be sufficient either.

Increasing global populations, urbanization, electrification and digitalization mean energy and electricity demand will continue to rise. To ensure clean electricity can match demand without reverting back to fossil fuels, society's energy intensity on the demand side must be reduced. Technologies that target energy-efficient conversions, transfers and end consumption will be critical to maintaining stable energy supplies without jeopardizing climate targets or compromising industry growth.

Finally, these supply and demand solutions must be accompanied by a dynamic and flexible electrical grid that can efficiently source, convert and distribute energy from an increasingly decentralized network of energy users and producers. The need for smart grid infrastructure is underscored by the fact that by 2050 investments in energy infrastructure will far exceed investments in energy generation.

From better semiconducting materials in electronics to better insulation materials in buildings, and from increasing automation in manufacturing to electrifying cars and transport, the Smart Energy strategy invests in clean and energy-efficient solutions across the energy value chain that are accelerating the transition to a net zero future.

## 'The energy sector is at a once-in-a-century crossroads'

# Why energy?

For nearly two centuries, energy and economic growth have moved in lockstep as society discovered and harnessed the power of new energy sources.

## Harnessing the power of energy for economic growth

The first industrial revolution used the energy potential of water and wheels to mechanize the manufacturing of textiles, food and tools. Soon after, manufacturers harnessed the power of carbon-rich coal, ushering in a new era of raw material processing for the machines, buildings and railway lines of an expanding 19th century economy.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, advances in electromagnetism and electrochemistry ultimately led to the diffusion of wires and electric currents that lit cities, channeled radio waves and led to society's first great electrification. During this same period, liquified petroleum products gained significance as the preferred energy source for an emerging automotive industry, supercharging a global dependency that has lasted more than a century. Moreover, the use of petroleum as a feedstock for plastics meant its economic dominance continued to expand through the end of the 20th century.

Throughout history, energy sources have evolved in step with scientific advances and society's need for growth and expansion. Newer sources beat predecessors based on their ability to offer more power, convenience and flexibility. The disastrous impacts of climate change necessitate the addition of one more performance capability to the list: today's energy sources must also be clean. As a result, renewables will ultimately replace fossil fuels as the dominant energy source of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## A variety of forces are pressuring energy markets

### The urgency of climate change

Energy use and economic growth have come at the expense of environmental health. The energy sector accounts for 75% of global emissions, making it by far the single largest contributor to climate change. From COP 21 through COP 26, global summits have clearly demonstrated a consensus for decarbonizing the world's economies.

### Clean energy and renewables

The shift to renewably produced electricity has been underway since the early 2000s as solar and wind power costs declined. That trend continues and has accelerated in the last five years. Renewables are the fastest-growing energy source. In 2020, despite declines for other types of energy fuels, renewable capacity grew, marking the highest year-on-year increase in nearly two decades.

In markets around the globe, including the US, Europe and China, solar power has become the lowest cost option for electricity generation. The International Energy Agency (IEA) even proclaimed solar PV the cheapest source of electricity in history.

Moreover, onshore and offshore wind are also benefitting from lower costs of capital and favorable financing, further propelling capacity expansions that increase scale and lower prices. Still, there is a long way to go. According to the IEA, the share of wind and solar PV in electricity generation must expand to almost 70% by 2050, compared with an average of just under 10% today.

The net zero trajectory requires annual investment in clean energy to reach USD 4 trillion by 2030, more than triple current levels. Though near-term investment costs are high, they are more than compensated by the future reward. In its Energy Outlook from 2020, the IEA estimated the combined market size of wind turbines, solar panels and electrification technologies (e.g., lithium-ion batteries, electrolyzers and fuel cells) to be worth USD 27 trillion through 2050.

## 'The net zero trajectory requires annual investment in clean energy to reach USD 4 trillion by 2030, more than triple current levels'

## Reducing energy intensity, raising energy efficiency

Green is great and needed to reduce carbon intensity, but it's still not enough to hit net zero. It must be accompanied by reducing energy intensity. Rising demand for electricity will place strains on renewable energy sources. To reduce this strain on clean energy without reverting to fossil fuels, the world must reduce its energy intensity. That means using less energy to accomplish the same amount of work. For national economies, this means using less energy to achieve the same level of GDP growth.

The prolific growth of the internet, big data and digitalization means electricity demand will continue to accelerate. Demand will further rise with the electrification of transport and building sectors. Electricity's share of total energy is expected to grow from 20% in 2020 to 50% by

2050. The rapid deployment of energy-efficient solutions is mission critical to lowering electricity use so that demand doesn't exceed green supplies.

Industry currently accounts for 40% of global energy consumption (second only to power generation) and hence is a hotbed for energy-efficient solutions. These solutions can range from the ordinary (LED lighting and household appliances) to the heavy-duty (industrial-sized air compressors, heat exchangers and power drives) to the sophisticated (semiconductors materials that reduce switching losses in electronic devices). Moreover, the proliferation of automated sensors, digital twins and other energy monitoring and management systems that cut across industries is also helping reduce energy waste.

### Figure 1 | Watts saved are emission avoided



Energy-efficient solutions in industrial facilities, residential homes and commercial buildings are also critical to cutting energy demand and lowering carbon emissions.

Source: iStock by Getty

Efficiency gains from insulation of buildings and electronic systems are also helping to maximize the energy efficiency of wind turbines, solar PVs and other renewable plants and equipment. The IEA estimates that investing in higher efficiency could halve future energy demand as well as reduce operational costs by USD 3 trillion through 2050.

## Electrification of buildings and transport

Electrification is a critical component of strategies to reduce energy demand, decarbonize economies and enable the uptake and expansion of emission-free energy throughout the economy. Currently, electricity powers around 20% of the global economy while fossil fuels cover the rest. But meeting net zero by 2050 requires these statistics to flip. Electrifying processes that currently rely on combustion fuels will be key in making the transition over the next three decades.

Outside of power generation and industrial processes, transportation and building are the most carbon-intensive and fossil-dependent sectors in the economy. As a result, they are prime targets in national strategies to decarbonize through electrification. The transportation sector is responsible for 24% of direct CO2 emissions from the combustion of petroleum-based fuels. Advances in battery technologies have enabled the electrification of passenger mobility, a market still heavily reliant on liquid petroleum. Not only does the switch to electric reduce fossil fuel use, it also increases energy efficiency. Today's electric cars use an average of 70% less energy to travel one kilometer than a conventional ICE, making them three to four times more energy efficient.

Today's building sector accounts for almost one-third of total final energy consumption and 30% of carbon emissions when electricity and heat are included. The deployment of electric heat pumps is an effective solution for lowering building emissions. And given they are three to four times more energy efficient than conventional boilers, they also reduce energy demand and lower operational costs.

## Smart grids - new generation and distribution systems

Reducing emissions in energy generation through renewables and in end-use applications is critical, but so too is greening transmission and distribution systems that carry, convert and deliver energy. As modes of energy production and energy use change, the energy grid that links them must also adapt.

The utility grid of the past was organized around a centralized, monopolistic model dominated by fossil fuels. But this century-old architecture together with its legacy equipment will need to be completely overhauled to accommodate new sources of fuel via solar and wind, new generation capacity from end users, and increased variability in energy demand and supply. As a result, 21st century energy networks must be efficient, dynamic, interactive, and flexible.

Despite being carbon-free, renewables are not problem free. On cloudy or windless days, little no energy is produced from solar cells and wind farms, making power generation intermittent and less reliable than traditional coal and gas sources. These conditions can change not only from season to season but also from day to day and hour to hour. In the future, network distributors must shift to utility-scale batteries and make use of low-carbon natural gas and green hydrogen solutions to solve the long-term storage issues and ensure system stability.

Moreover, rooftop solar and battery storage from millions of electric vehicles mean households, communities, commercial buildings, industrial complexes and even charging infrastructure for transportation networks are becoming decentralized sources of energy generation. Smarter power grids are needed to adapt to these new realities. Digital technologies will play crucial roles in integrating the millions of new nodes and new flows that will characterize future energy systems.

## Why now?

There's no time to waste. The world is warming, regulations are tightening, technologies are scaling, and markets are shifting towards a low-carbon reality.

### Heightened urgency for clean energy supplies

Recent data models from the IPCC reveal we are on track to hit a catastrophic 2.7°C temperate increase rather than the agreed 1.5°C. More powerful perhaps than the technical data is however the destructive impact of climate change we're witnessing almost daily around the globe. Whether empirical or anecdotal, all evidence points to a world that is not racing fast enough to net zero.

Though compared with Paris, the COP26 outcomes were not momentous, they did reveal momentum. Moreover, the COP summits have helped galvanize public awareness and political peer pressure, key tools for effective change. Countries and companies reaffirmed pledges and outlined policy pathways that will reshape long-standing supply chains across sectors, creating winners and losers along the way. This is nowhere more evident than in energy markets where weather extremes, energy policies and consumer demand are already creating volatilities for market participants.

The current crisis is a harbinger of things to come and emphasizes the dire need to accelerate investments in renewable capacity and energy storage infrastructure as well as energy-efficient solutions that temper energy demand. It also emphasizes the limitations of a 20th century energy grid that is ill-equipped to meet the dynamic energy demands of our 21st century society. The good news is that mature solutions are on the scene, and more are in end-stage development.

### Climate solutions are gaining momentum

From solar cells and wind turbines to electric vehicles and heat pumps, the cost of clean technologies is falling dramatically compared with traditional products and clean solutions are scaling in markets around the globe. In 2020, renewables accounted for 90% of net power capacity expansion globally.

EV uptake is also increasing. With more than three million cars sold, the global EV market reached 4.3% of global auto sales in 2020 and is showing no signs of abating in 2021. Global penetration rates were around 8% through the first half of 2021 and in Europe, the third quarter marked the first time EVs outsold diesel vehicles.

The global stock of heat pumps has increased 10% annually over the past five years and will shoot higher as green

building mandates for new and existing buildings across residential, commercial and industrial market segments around the world take effect.

These trends impact not only the built environment but also big tech. As digitalization expands and connectivity densifies, more data is being processed and more heat is being generated. As a result, data centers housing giant networks of servers spanning millions of square meters globally are investing in state-of-the-art cooling systems to protect heat-sensitive electrical components and avoid network meltdowns. Moreover, to decrease the heat generated by microchips and electrical equipment, big tech and big industry are investing in hyper-efficient materials which help reduce transistor temperatures and enhance processing performance.

## Figure 2 | Cleaning the data



Servers at a data center farm. Cutting-edge semiconducting materials on the inside of electrical equipment and efficient cooling systems on the outside are helping reduce energy use and data's carbon footprint as electrification and digitization expand across sectors.

Source: iStock by Getty

## Government action is supporting clean energy markets

More policies are on the horizon that will further boost clean tech and infrastructure in major markets. Through the next decade, the US will spend USD 73 billion to modernize and decarbonize its power grid via investments in clean renewables, USD 7.5 billion for EV charging infrastructure, and another USD 7.5 billion for clean buses. China's National Energy Administration has set a further target for renewables to account for half of the country's installed capacity by 2025 as well as proposed raising minimum companies' renewable energy purchases to 40% by 2030.

Perhaps the most powerful piece of policy that will promote clean and lower carbon technologies is carbon pricing regimes. As part of its net zero pathway, the EU expanded its Emissions Trading System (ETS) to include more sectors, and over time will increasingly reduce the number of carbon permits available to companies across the market.

That means the cost of polluting and the cost of capital will inevitably rise, squeezing profits for not only fossil fuel producers but also companies that have failed to invest in low carbon and energy-efficient solutions. In parallel, producers of renewables and emissions-reducing technologies will become increasingly more attractive.

### Abundant private sector financing available

While public policies are potent, momentum in the private sector is also gaining traction. The UN Global Compact and Race to Zero campaigns are mobilizing corporate action and commitments to limit global warming to 1.5°C. As of COP26, 1,045 companies representing more than USD 23 trillion in market capitalization have signed and agreed to invest in the tools and strategies needed to reach net zero by 2050.

Financial capital too should flow more freely to companies focused on net zero alignment. The Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero (GFANZ) led by former Bank of England governor Mark Carney, represents the commitment of 450 global financial institutions with 130 trillion in assets which are geared towards boosting investment and bringing green solutions to the market.

'the cost of polluting and the cost of capital will inevitably rise, squeezing profits for not only fossil fuel producers but also companies that have failed to invest in low carbon and energy-efficient solutions'

## Why RobecoSAM Smart Energy?

The RobecoSAM Smart Energy Equities strategy invests in the transformation of the entire energy sector towards a low-carbon future.

## A comprehensive approach

Net zero requires more than the switch from fossil fuels to clean renewables. Clean energy production, electrification, energy efficient consumption and smart power grids are just a few areas across the energy value chain that will experience rapid growth as industries and economies shift to low-carbon operating environments.

The RobecoSAM Smart Energy Equities strategy (the Strategy) invests across these key growth themes, focusing specifically on the electrification of road transport, the built environment and some industrial processes.

Moreover, in the coming decades, as more and more sectors electrify, demand for electricity will skyrocket. To ensure there is sufficient clean energy to match increased electricity consumption, the Strategy invests in state-of-theart semiconducting materials and power management devices that efficiently capture, convert and distribute energy within and between electronic devices. As a result, the energy and carbon intensity of end-use applications is reduced, and system stability is ensured over the long term.

Finally, the Strategy invests in technologies that enable efficient digitalized smart grids that distribute clean energy supplies across a network of decentralized energy suppliers and users.

## Figure 3 | Investment clusters



Renewable energies - Companies that provide critical equipment, supplies and services to support the generation and distribution of renewable energy, including solar cells, on and offshore wind turbines, and pure-play renewable operators.

Energy distribution – Companies providing the infrastructure, equipment and software solutions to enable the digitization and decentralization of the energy grid (smart grids) so that energy supplies and demand can be efficiently matched.



Energy management – Companies providing the semiconducting technologies to enable the safe capture, conversion and distribution of energy to and between digital devices (solar panels to grid electricity, high to low voltage environments, etc.) and energy storage capacity via batteries.

Energy efficiency – Companies enabling the decarbonization of heavy-emitting industries such as transportation via EVs and connective technologies (5G, all benefot and the second sec

saving insulation and the electrification of heating and ventilation, as well as more energy-efficient data-processing across the digital economy.

#### Actively managed, sustainably driven

The Smart Energy strategy is supported by an investment team with deep knowledge and diverse experience across energy, transportation and mobility, semiconductors and software systems, chemicals and materials, in addition to finance, economics and investing.

The investment team collaborates closely with Robeco's SI Research team. The SI team is organized by sector and therefore able to offer specialized expertise on sustainability trends and issues affecting industries and their constituent companies. Our SI analysts also carry out in-depth assessments on sector and company ESG performance as well as their impact on the UN SDGs. SI inputs are integrated into portfolio-specific investment decisions and help inform future investment strategies.

Since inception in 2003, the Strategy's assets have grown to nearly EUR 3.6 billion as of 31. October 2021.

 Table 1
 Smart Energy strategy track record<sup>1</sup>

	1 year	3 years	5 years	Since inception (2003)
RobecoSAM Smart Energy Equities	54.96%	37.37%	25.21%	12.68%
MSCI World Index TRN	41.35%	17.37%	14.21%	9.29%
Relative performance	13.62%	19.99%	11.00%	3.39%

Annualized performance of the RobecoSAM Smart Energy Equities strategy. Gross of fees, EUR. Source: Robeco. Data as of 31 Oct 2021.

Moreover, the Strategy takes a long-term view and uses future sustainability risks and opportunities to help evaluate a company's value proposition for society and investors. Companies whose dominant revenues stem from products that are questionable, controversial or incompatible with the Strategy's sustainable principles are excluded.

## Promoting SDGs

The Strategy invests in companies creating long-term value for stakeholders in society, not just shareholders of stock. These companies contribute directly to multiple SDGs, including affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry innovation and infrastructure, sustainable cities and communities and climate action.

Figure 4 | Strategy-related SDGs<sup>2</sup>



SUSTAINABLE GOALS

Source: Robeco, UN Sustainable Development Goals Data as of September 2021.

In addition, Robeco has successfully developed a proprietary tool that scores companies in the thematic universe based on the strength of their contributions to theme-relevant SDGs. Companies which detract from SDG targets are excluded from the portfolio.

Finally, the Strategy benefits from the voting and engagement activities of Robeco's Active Ownership team, which drives awareness, education and action among and within companies on the risks and opportunities of addressing sustainability issues within their operations and markets.

For more information, please contact your Robeco Sales Manager or our Client Servicing team at rs-clientservicing@robeco.com.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Robeco. Performance since inception is as of the first full month. The currency in which the past performance is displayed may differ from the currency of your country of residence. Due to exchange rate fluctuations the performance shown may increase or decrease if converted into your local currency. Periods shorter than one year are not annualized. The value of your investments may fluctuate. Past performance is no guarantee of future results. Returns gross of fees, based on gross asset value. Values and returns indicated here are before cost; neither consider the management fee as well as other administration costs related to the fund nor the fees and costs which may be charged when subscribing, redeeming and/or switching units. These have a negative effect on the returns shown. 1 first performance date: 30.09.2003. Effective October 29th 2020, selected RobecoSAM equity funds were merged onto the RCGF SICAV platform and received new inception dates, share classes, and ISIN codes. All performance prior to the RCGF SICAV merger on October 29th 2020, has been calculated based on the investment policies, fees, and share classes of the respective sub-fund under the previous SICAV.

<sup>2</sup> The SDGs listed are not exhaustive, have been prioritized based on strength of impact and the overarching goals of the Smart Materials Equities strategy over the long term. A complete reporting of SDGs associated with the Strategy can be obtained upon request.

## Article 9

The fund has been classified as an Article 9 investment under the EU's Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation (SFDR).

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