ENERGY EFFICIENCY

MAGAZINE

11TH ISSUE



COP31

ANTALYA - TURQUIE

Mission Efficiency

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Energy Efficiency Enhances the Robustness of Our Economy

Benoît Lebot is an international energy and climate expert with nearly 40 years of experience in energy efficiency, climate policy and sustainable energy transitions, including senior roles at UNDP, IEA and IPEEC.



A Summer That Settled the Debate

The evidence of climate change has never been clearer. The summer of 2026 broke an unprecedented series of records: heatwaves of extraordinary duration and intensity, megafires that swept through forests and communities, floods that submerged entire regions, and a steady stream of climate incidents disrupting daily life across every continent. Each new scientific assessment confirms what citizens now experience firsthand — the need to decarbonize the economy, all economies, has never been more evident.

An Era of Compounding Turbulences

Over the past years, the world has entered an era of multiple, overlapping turbulences. Climate shocks, geopolitical tensions, supply chain disruptions, social unrest and economic volatility no longer occur in isolation — they intersect, superimpose and mutually amplify one another. A drought strains food prices; an energy crisis feeds inflation; inflation feeds political instability, which in turn undermines climate action.

From now on, we must expect a world of permanent fluctuation, with shocks and disruptions arising unpredictably and widely. In such a world, resilience is not a luxury — it is a condition of survival. Communities, companies and individuals without safety belts will be seriously affected, if not outright damaged, by each new shock. Those who have invested in robustness will absorb the blows and recover faster.

To mitigate these fluctuations, energy efficiency must be placed at the forefront of our collective and individual action. It is the one policy that simultaneously reduces exposure to energy price volatility, cuts emissions, lowers costs, creates local jobs and strengthens strategic autonomy — all with proven, available technologies.

A Persistently Under-Recognified Priority

Yet despite what appears to be a global wake-up call, the importance of energy efficiency still remains insufficiently recognized and lacks implementation across all sectors of the economy. Year after year, during each UNFCCC COP, the Energy Efficiency Magazine puts forward new arguments, new profiles and new outcomes demonstrating the benefits of lowering energy demand through greater efficiency. The evidence accumulates; the gap between evidence and action persists.

Renewables Have Succeeded — The Demand Side Has Not Followed

Renewable energies have now reached both scale and full economic maturity. They are fully mainstreamed in investment portfolios and energy prospects across most economies. This is genuinely great news — and proof that profound transformations of our societies are possible within a generation.

However, ensuring that renewable energy truly replaces conventional fossil energy — rather than merely being added on top of it — requires solid investment on the demand side of the energy equation. Hydrogen, Carbon Capture and Storage, and the electrification of everything have captured attention and continue to gain momentum. Yet, sadly, without energy efficiency lowering the energy burden of society, global greenhouse gas emissions have still not begun their decline. We are running faster and faster on the supply side, while the demand side continues to expand and consume the gains.

Untapped Energy Efficiency Potential Across Every Sector

Buildings. The huge energy-saving potential of the built environment remains largely untapped. Technical solutions — from deep retrofitting of existing stock to enhanced digital control and building management tools — are mature, but insufficiently implemented. Financial instruments, skilled workforce capacity and regulatory ambition lag far behind what is technically possible.

Transport. In some markets, the electrification of mobility is genuinely changing the transport landscape. But without energy efficiency, the weight, usage patterns and cost of vehicles limit the overall environmental benefit of electrification. An oversized, overused electric fleet merely relocates the problem rather than solving it.

Industry. Spreading the most energy-efficient techniques through heavy industry still lacks a level playing field — carbon pricing signals remain uneven, and best practices are confined to small-scale, scattered experiments rather than becoming the sector-wide norm.

Energy Efficiency Is a Fuel

Energy efficiency is a fuel able to support economic and human development. Like any fuel, it must be explored, mined, extracted, distributed and put to use. Like any extraction industry, it requires specific talents, dedicated techniques and technologies, supportive policy frameworks, sustained political attention and — crucially — attracted investment, in order to deliver the promised benefits.

The reserves of this fuel are vast: the International Energy Agency has repeatedly identified efficiency as the "first fuel," capable of meeting a larger share of energy demand than any single conventional source. But unlike oil or gas, this fuel is renewable in an economic sense — every avoided unit of consumption can be re-earned, every efficiency gain compounds over the lifetime of buildings, machines and behaviours. What is missing is not the resource. It is the drilling equipment: financing mechanisms, training, standards, and the political will to prioritize demand-side action.

Energy Efficiency is our Safest Safety Belt

In view of today's world situation — climatic, geopolitical and economic — our economies must become more robust. Robustness does not come from producing more energy regardless of cost or consequence. It comes from needing less, wasting less, and extracting more value from every unit of energy we consume.

Giving priority to energy efficiency is our safest safety belt — the one that protects us against energy price shocks, supply crises, climate impacts and competitive decline at the same time. It is time to fasten it.