Managing seasonal and inter-annual variability of renewables

Dr Ilkka Hannula, Senior Energy Analyst

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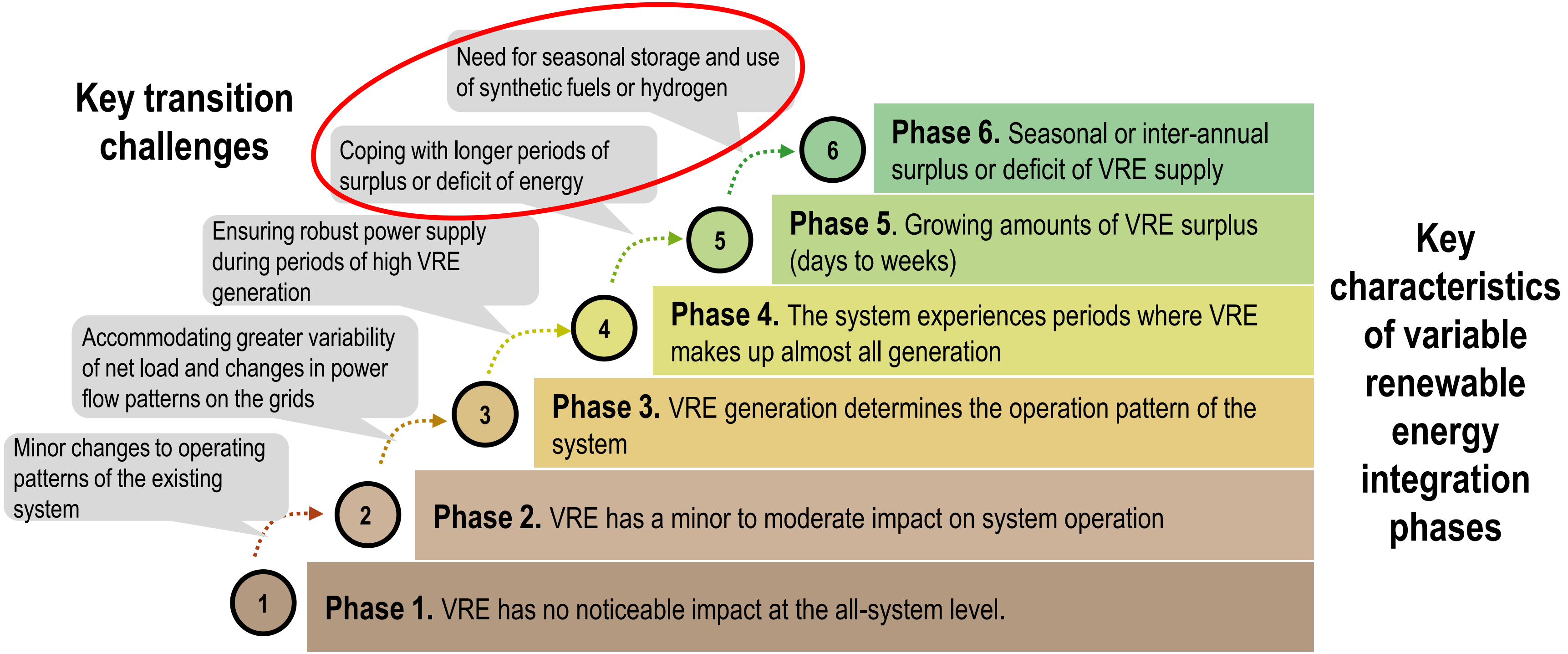
Context

- 2021 study on the Role of low-carbon fuels in power systems:
  - Low-emissions hydrogen and ammonia can play an important role to help ensure electricity security in clean energy transitions.
  - They have important potential in regions where the thermal fleet is young, or the availability of other low-emissions dispatchable resources is constrained.
  - The value of hydrogen and ammonia depends on system contexts and regional conditions.

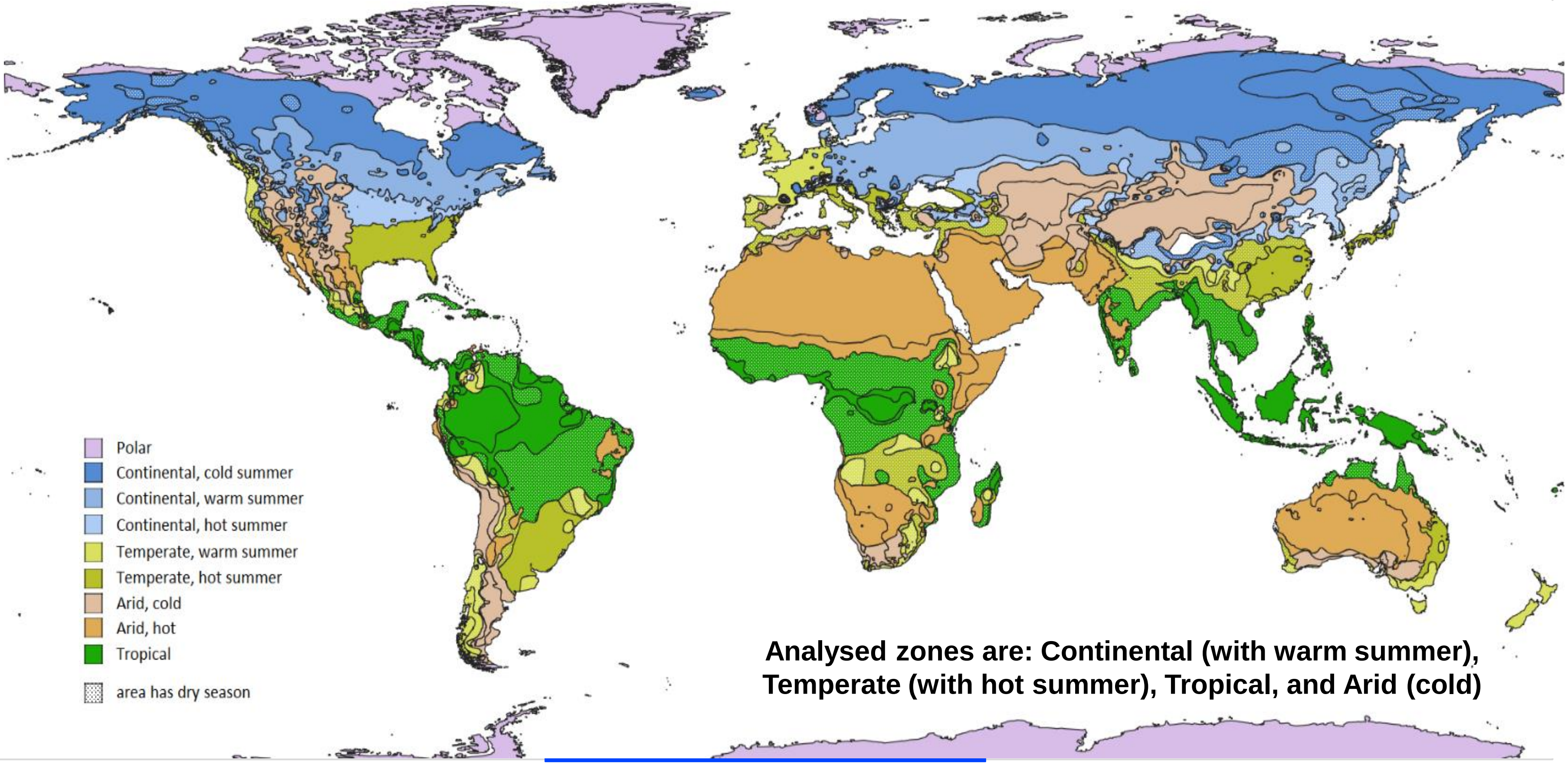
- Research questions for the ongoing work:
  - What kind of long-duration variation can be expected at very high shares of renewables?
  - How does seasonal and inter-annual variation depend on different climatic conditions?
  - What is the potential role of low-emissions fuels in managing long-duration variation?

Six phases of renewables integration



Several countries and power markets are already in Phase 4, and will be increasingly entering Phases 5 & 6 as countries pursue their net-zero targets.

Current analysis focuses on four key climatic zones



Analysed zones are: Continental (with warm summer), Temperate (with hot summer), Tropical, and Arid (cold)

Seasonal patterns emerge from the interaction of demand and renewables supply

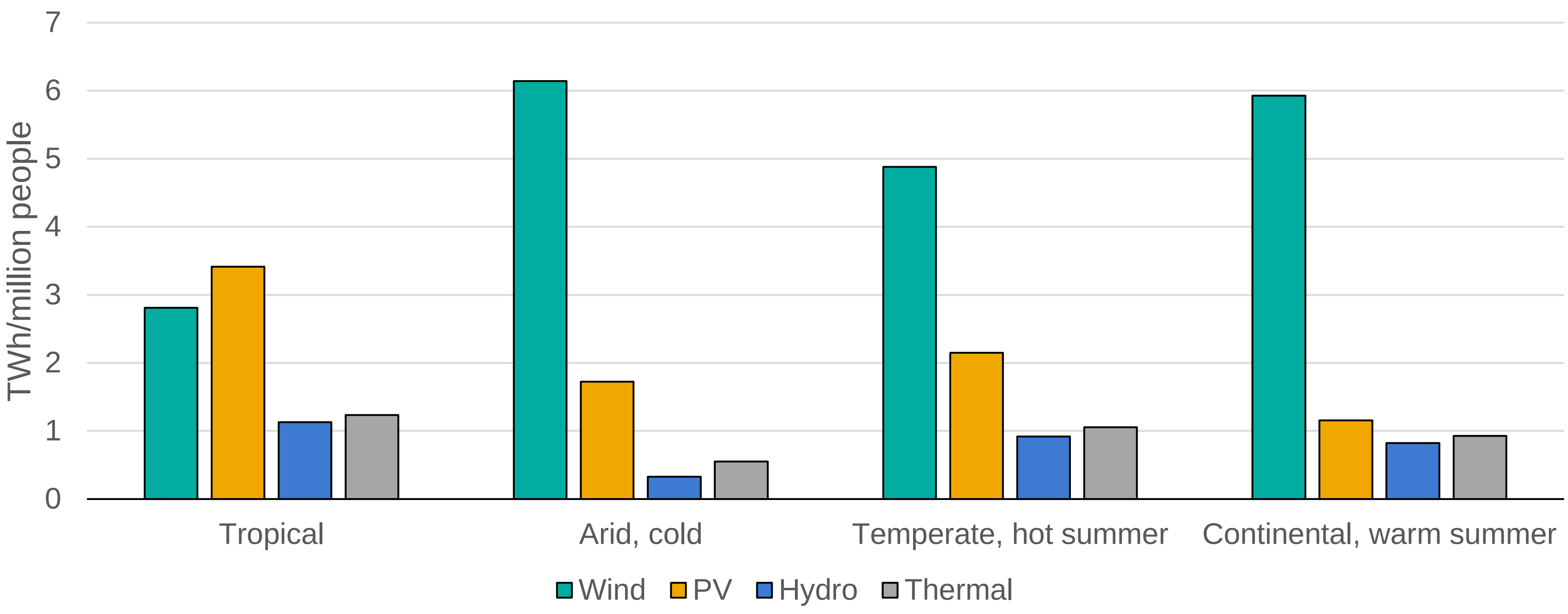
Key seasonal attributes of analysed climate zones.

	Seasonal demand profile	Size of peak load	Hydro availability	Seasonal wind & PV complementarity
Tropical		|	■ ■ ■	−
Arid, cold		|	■	−
Continental, warm summer		||	■ ■ ■	+
Temperate, hot summer		|||	■ ■	+

Challenges to integrate renewables over long time periods increase with strong mismatches between energy demand and renewables supply on a seasonal scale.

Climate conditions influence the electricity mix

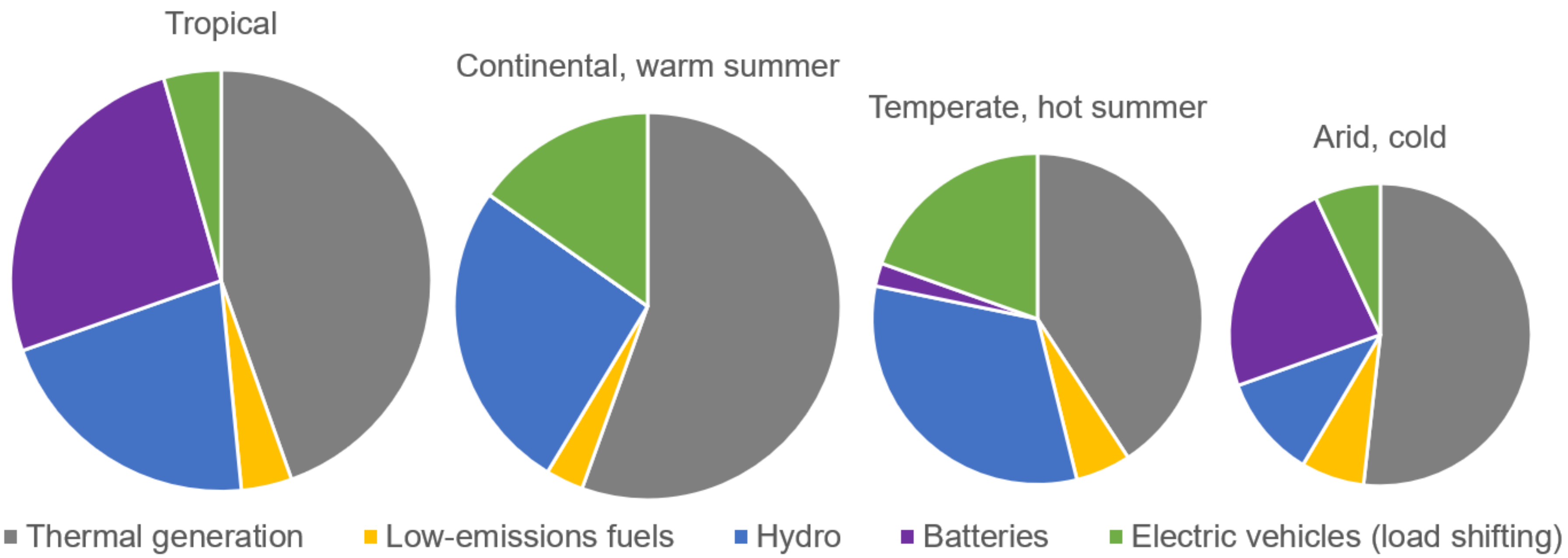
Breakdown of annual domestic electricity generation for the analysed climate zones.



Technologies remain the same, but climatic and energy system conditions govern their contribution. In the results, VRE share is 70-80% with legacy thermal fleets representing 5-15% of annual generation.

Thermal plants are an important source of flexibility in high VRE systems

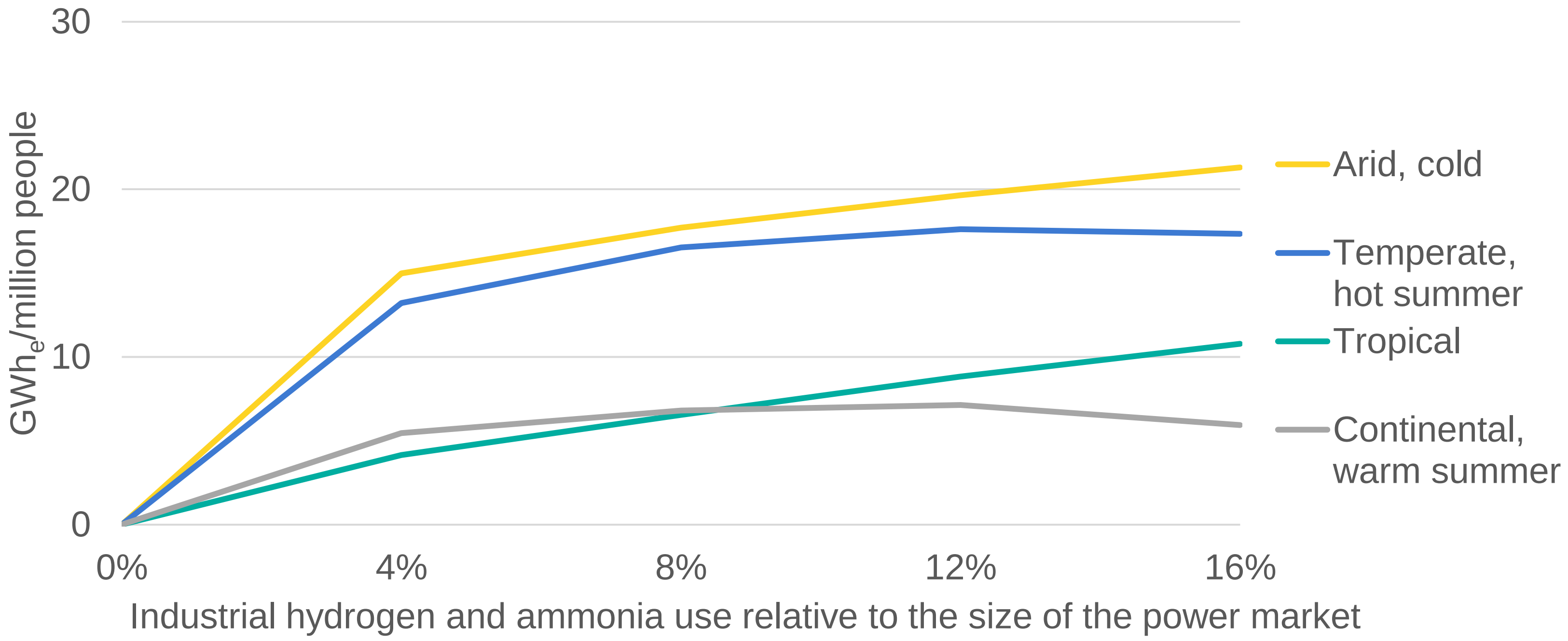
Main technologies responsible for supplying annual electricity storages in the analysed climate zones.



VRE share 70-80% of annual generation with legacy fossil-fired plants and fossil fuel supply chains. Despite high share of thermal generation, the potential to use low-emissions fuels produced from domestic resources remains limited due to high cost.

Industrial use of low-emissions fuels reduces the cost of co-firing

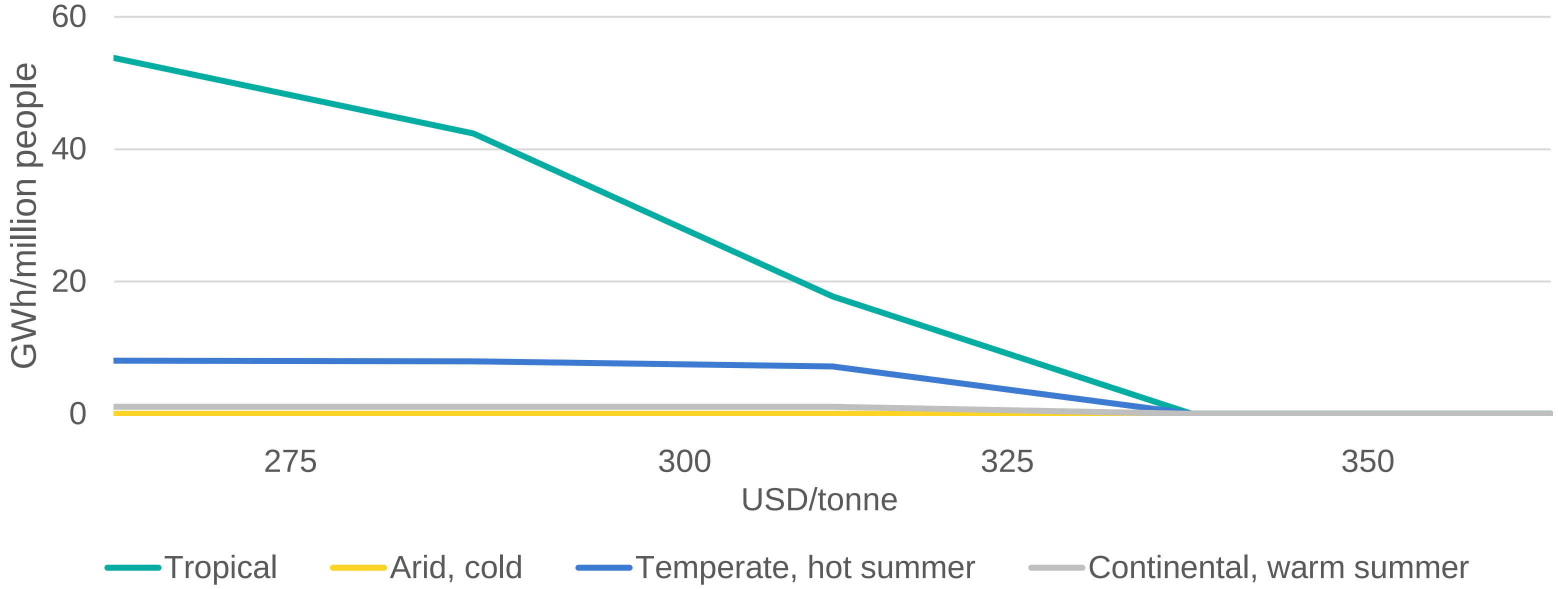
Impact of industrial hydrogen and ammonia use on co-firing in thermal power plants based on domestic renewable resources.



Industrial use of hydrogen and ammonia stimulates investments in the associated supply chain infrastructure, which will lower the cost of low-emission fuels for other uses.

Ammonia supply costs must decrease further to enable international trade

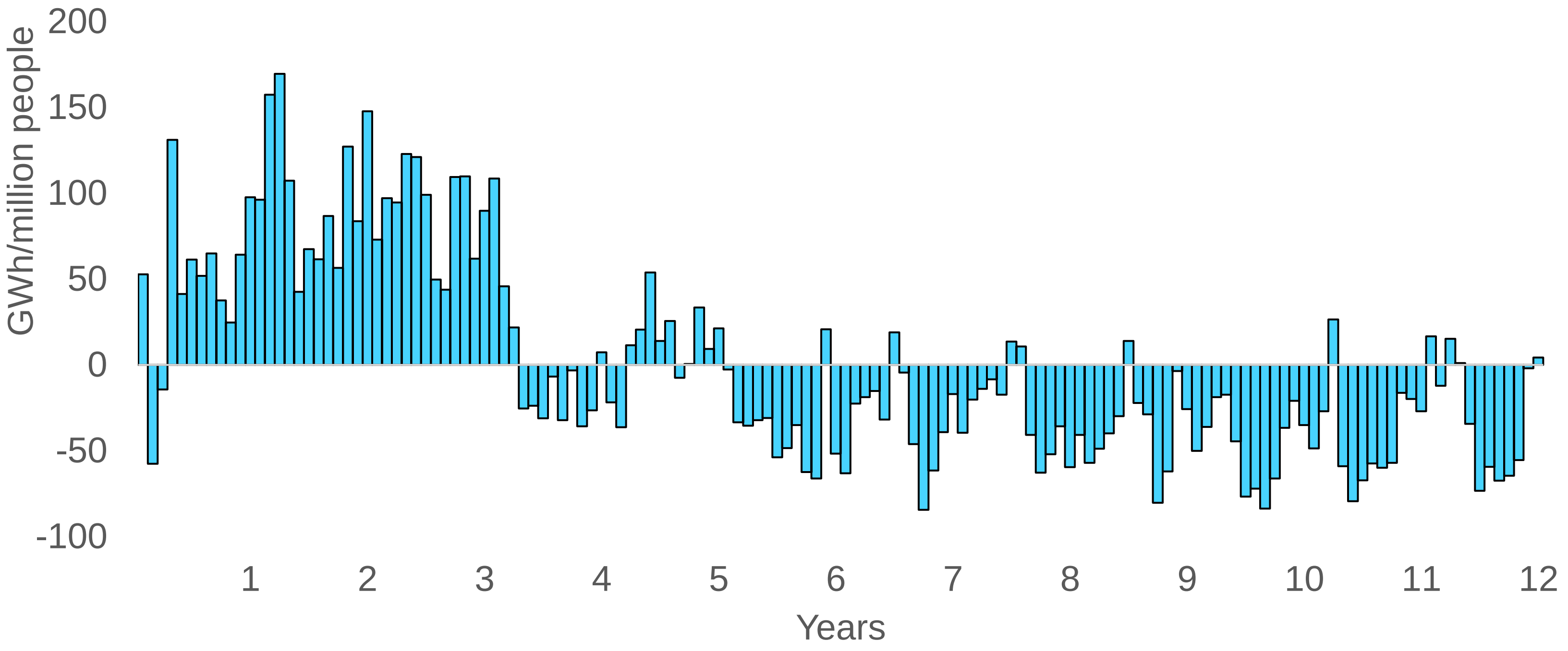
Impact of import cost on the demand of low-emissions ammonia in the analysed climate zones.



Domestic potential to produce and use low-emissions fuels could be enhanced by imports, but the import cost would need to decrease below USD 350/tonne.

Hydro drives inter-annual variation in the continental reference system

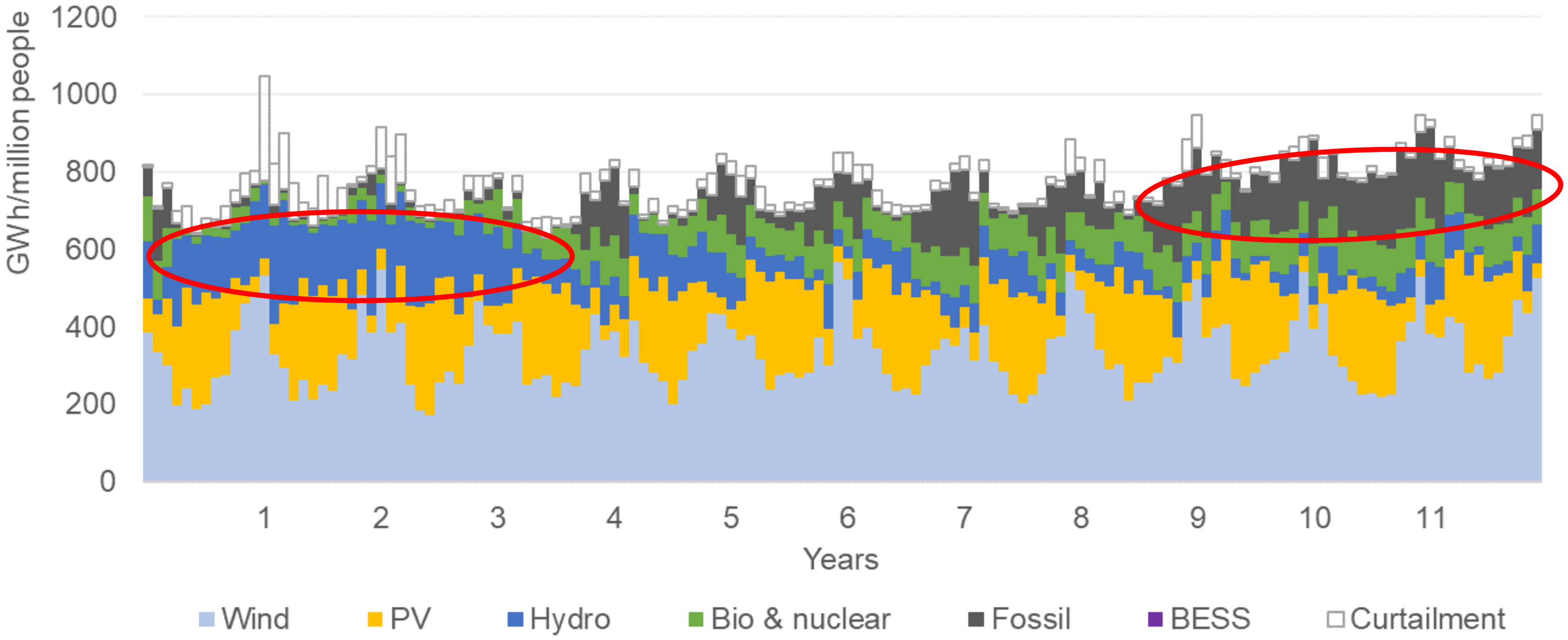
Difference in monthly hydropower generation compared to 12-yr average for the continental (warm summer) reference system.



The complied dataset shows particularly challenging period with several consecutive years of low hydropower generation compared to the monthly average of 95 GWh/million people over the 12 year period.

Inter-annual variation is met with legacy thermal capacity in this ref. system

Monthly generation by technology over a period of 12 years in the continental (warm summer) reference system.



System dispatches first existing low-emission thermal capacity followed by existing fossil fuel capacity to meet the net load during consecutive years of low hydrogeneration.

Conclusions

- At high shares of renewables, long-duration surpluses and deficits become a key challenge of renewables integration, largely covered by flexibility from thermal power plants (45-60%).
- Low-emissions fuels remain expensive for electricity generation, but are a potential source of low-emissions flexibility. Their value depends on climatic and system contexts.
- Sharing infrastructure investments with industrial users helps to reduce total costs, and helps to create new value chains for the power market.
- At import prices below USD 350/tonne international ammonia trade can connect regions that have low-cost renewable resources with regions where low-emissions fuels have high value.
- At high shares of renewables, consecutive inter-annual deficits can be more difficult to manage than any single year in the studied reference systems.