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Item 9 of the provisional agenda*
Dates and venue of and theme for the eighty-second session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2026)

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Note by the secretariat

Summary

The present document contains information on the proposed dates and venue of the eighty-second session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, to be held in 2026, and proposals for the theme for that session.

The Commission may wish to take a decision on these matters.

I. Introduction

1. The present document contains suggestions made by the secretariat for the consideration of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific at its eighty-first session on the dates and venue of and theme for its eighty-second session, to be held in 2026.

II. Dates and venue

2. Rule 1 of the rules of procedure of the Commission requires it to recommend the dates and venue of its next session, subject to the approval of the Economic and Social Council and in consultation with the Secretary-General.

3. In addition, in rule 1 of the rules of procedure it is stated that the sessions of the Commission shall ordinarily be held at the office of the United Nations in Asia and the Pacific, unless the Commission recommends otherwise.

4. In accordance with the programmatic procedural requirements of the United Nations Secretariat, the annual proposed programme plan is to be endorsed by the Commission before it is submitted for review and approval by

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the General Assembly. Pursuant to Assembly resolution 77/267, the timeline for reviewing the proposed programme plans by the Committee for Programme and Coordination, the main subsidiary organ of the Economic and Social Council and the Assembly for planning, programming and coordination, has been brought forward starting in 2024. The Commission will therefore need to review and endorse the proposed programme plan for 2027 before the end of April 2026.

5. The secretariat proposes that the eighty-second session of the Commission be held in Bangkok from 20 to 24 April 2026, taking into account also other major meetings and holidays occurring in April 2026.

III. Theme

6. The Commission is invited to consider the following proposals regarding the theme for its eighty-second session:

(a) A society for all ages in Asia and the Pacific: ensuring inclusive and sustainable economic growth in a world of rapid demographic transition;

(b) Innovative financing mechanisms for sustainable development;

(c) Strengthening regional cooperation on artificial intelligence applications for sustainable development.

A. A society for all ages in Asia and the Pacific: ensuring inclusive and sustainable economic growth in a world of rapid demographic transition

7. The Asia-Pacific region is undergoing sweeping and rapid demographic changes, spurred by sharp falls in fertility rates and increases in life expectancy in almost all countries in the region. Over the past 60 years, the region has changed beyond recognition. In 1963, the population of the region was 1.9 billion, with a total fertility rate of about 6.0 births per woman and a life expectancy at birth of 51.3 years. Children aged 0–14 accounted for 40 per cent of the total population, whereas persons 65 years or older accounted for about 4 per cent. Today, the region has a population of about 4.8 billion, which represents about 58 per cent of the global population. The total fertility rate has plunged to 1.8 births per woman, life expectancy at birth has increased to 74.7 years, children account for 22.1 per cent of the total population and older persons account for 10.5 per cent.

8. The proportion of older persons is projected to increase to 19 per cent of the total population, or almost 1 billion people, by 2050. However, the picture across the region is not uniform. While many countries in the region, especially those in East and North-East Asia and in South-East Asia, are considered aged societies with older persons accounting for more than 14 per cent of the total population, some countries have significant numbers of young people. The region is home to 56 per cent of the global youth population. This is the first time that large cohorts of older persons, youth and persons of working age will coexist. Addressing the needs and concerns of both youth and older persons in a balanced manner is therefore one of the main challenges faced by countries in the region.

9. This rapid demographic transition is occurring alongside waves of technological transitions, led by the digital revolution and the development of artificial intelligence.

10. The big questions occupying the minds of policymakers and thinkers are how to maintain the economic productivity of the labour force in the context of rapid population ageing and how to prepare societies of the future for the challenges that lie ahead. The region is becoming old before it becomes rich, and many people face the prospect of spending a significant proportion of their old age in disability and ill health. It is important to note that the demographic transition has been achieved because of economic development, poverty alleviation efforts, improvements in health and education and progress towards gender equality.

11. However, this progress has not been without its challenges. First, it has resulted in widening inequalities in many parts of the region. In many countries, the majority of the labour force works in the large informal sector, characterized by a lack of social protection and low productivity, which in turn further exacerbates inequality. The window of opportunity to benefit from the demographic dividend has closed or is closing in many parts of the region. Consequently, a large proportion of the population in some countries will reach old age without having any income security or access to adequate healthcare, unless steps are taken to ensure that young people have access to health, education and decent employment.

12. Second, the female labour force participation rate in the region is 43.6 per cent, which is well below the global average. The rate is below 25 per cent in some subregions. Even when they are participating in the labour force, women are disproportionately overrepresented in the informal sector. Furthermore, women in the region devote two to five times more hours a day than men to unpaid care and domestic work. The region is clearly not exploiting the full economic potential of women, who constitute 50 per cent of its population.

13. Third, the technological changes sweeping the world – especially the digital revolution, the proliferation and pervasiveness of social media and the rise of artificial intelligence – are transforming society. If these technologies are not properly harnessed, they could exacerbate existing divides, which will affect societal harmony and cohesion.

14. In the proposed theme study, the secretariat would examine the above challenges, including the interlinkages between them, and propose policy options to address them. It would also analyse the roles of different sections of society and the investments required. The proposed policy options would be aimed at doing the following:

(a) Ensuring that the full benefits of the demographic dividend are realized by creating decent work and employment for youth and ensuring adequate social protection. Policies to reskill youth to address the new needs of the labour force in the context of sustainable development and climate change action would be presented. Options to extend social protection to the informal sector and to formalize the informal sector would also be highlighted;

(b) Enhancing the productivity of older persons through lifelong learning, reskilling and upskilling, flexible retirement policies and measures to address ageism within the labour force;

(c) Facilitating the participation of women in the formal labour force by adopting policies that address the barriers to entry. The analysis would be focused on policy measures to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work through the strengthening of the care economy, including the improvement of care infrastructure, care services and care-related social protection. Investing in the care economy and developing comprehensive care

systems would not only reduce women's unpaid care burden and gender gaps, but it would also create more decent jobs in the care sector. The analysis would include a focus on the economic benefits of women's participation in the labour force, including adding to the gross domestic product and contributing to a resilient and sustainable economy;

(d) Implementing strategies to harness technology, including digital technology and social media, in an inclusive manner and to reduce the digital divide. To benefit all sections of society, technology has to be made affordable and accessible to all and adequate safeguards have to be put in place;

(e) Strengthening intergenerational relations between older persons and youth, which will be important to ensure harmonious and cohesive societies where different generations are able to share resources and knowledge in a mutually beneficial manner. Based on the understanding that the youth of today are the older persons of tomorrow, the importance of adopting a life course approach to the healthy and active ageing of populations would be stressed.

15. The above policy interventions would form the basis of a proposed policy framework for moving towards a caring society for all ages in the Asia-Pacific region. The study would build upon the outcomes of the Summit of the Future and the expected outcomes of the Second World Summit for Social Development, to be held in November 2025.

B. Innovative financing mechanisms for sustainable development

16. In the Pact for the Future, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 79/1, Heads of State and Government committed to close the Sustainable Development Goal financing gap in developing countries in order to prevent a lasting sustainable development divide, widening inequality within and between countries and a further erosion of trust in the multilateral system. To that end, among other actions, it was decided to create a more enabling environment at the global, regional and national levels to increase the mobilization of domestic resources (action 4 (f)) and support developing countries to catalyse increased private sector investment in sustainable development, including by promoting inclusive and innovative finance mechanisms and partnerships (action 4 (k)).

17. Participants in the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, to be held in Seville, Spain, from 30 June to 3 July 2025, are expected to reiterate the importance of closing finance and investment gaps and mobilizing and aligning all sources of finance. Other areas of focus are expected to be on promoting a stronger international financial architecture and on the importance of formulating and financing new development strategies.

18. Innovative financing is generally accepted to refer to financing mechanisms and solutions that increase the volume, efficiency and effectiveness of financial flows and that mobilize, govern or distribute funds beyond official development assistance. It can include mechanisms to raise funds and stimulate action, by public, private and philanthropic actors, in support of international sustainable development in new and more efficient and scalable ways to solve social, economic and environmental problems globally. It can also include non-traditional applications of public-private partnerships or catalytic mechanisms to raise and leverage multiple sources of financing and promote the engagement of the public sector, businesses and investors as partners and stakeholders in development.

19. The importance of financial resources has been well recognized by the Commission. For instance, in its resolution 78/1 – the Bangkok Declaration Commemorating the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific: a Common Agenda to Advance Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific – members and associate members underscored the importance of enhancing sustainable financing for development goals and committed to align public and private financial resources to effectively pursue their sustainable development aspirations. They committed to strengthen fiscal positions, promote regional cooperation where needed and explore various innovative financing instruments and mechanisms, including public and private financing, as well as fiscal, market and regulatory mechanisms, as appropriate, that could help to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, based on multilateralism and international cooperation.

20. The proposed theme would present an opportunity to focus on innovative financing mechanisms and solutions that could support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and to showcase successful country examples from across Asia and the Pacific.

21. Sustainable development in the region cannot be achieved through public finance alone. Increasingly, integrated public-private financing mechanisms, instruments and processes are being used to fund measures to, for example, strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerability to climate change; accelerate the energy transition and develop sustainable transport systems, including measures to address the social impacts of the transition; ensure the achievement of better social and human development outcomes for women, girls, persons with disabilities and marginalized communities; support biodiversity restoration and the protection of oceans; and prevent disasters and deal more effectively with the loss and damage they cause.

22. Innovative financing mechanisms and solutions have an important role to play in this regard. Beyond traditional sustainable finance instruments and mechanisms, innovative financing mechanisms can include approaches such as sustainable bonds and loans, guarantees, swaps and blended finance. They can also include changes in policies and regulations that strengthen the financing of sustainable development. Presenting and analysing innovative financing mechanisms and solutions from across Asia and the Pacific would allow for them to be scaled up and disseminated across the region, with a view to complementing existing and traditional sources and methods of financing for development.

23. The proposed theme study could be focused on:

(a) Highlighting progress made and identifying gaps in innovative financing mechanisms and solutions in selected areas, such as energy, environment, transport, social protection, trade and disaster risk reduction;

(b) Showcasing country experiences that feature integrated, multi-stakeholder partnerships with a view to producing long-term, innovative financing solutions;

(c) Identifying innovative financing mechanisms and discussing potential enabling policies that could incentivize and increase financial flows towards those areas and sectors where help is most needed to close the Sustainable Development Goal financing gap in Asia and the Pacific;

(d) Identifying regional cooperation opportunities to promote innovative financing mechanisms, through which global trends and the emerging consensus on financing for sustainable development could be

leveraged, with the involvement of not only the public sector but also multilateral development banks and private finance actors.

24. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific by 2030 will require the formulation of new strategies for development, supported by new and innovative financing solutions. It will require the cooperation and engagement of multilateral actors, as well as public and private stakeholders. As the most inclusive and representative intergovernmental platform in Asia and the Pacific, the Commission can contribute significantly to this endeavour.

C. Strengthening regional cooperation on artificial intelligence applications for sustainable development

25. Technological and scientific advancements offer the potential for a more prosperous and sustainable future for both people and the planet. The capabilities of artificial intelligence are transforming economies and societies, offering new potential for sustainable development. The discovery of groundbreaking solutions promises to foster new waves of innovation across all sectors. The resulting synergies could accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, paving the way for more inclusive growth, a green digital future and a more equitable delivery of public services.

26. One of the five thematic areas of the Pact for the Future, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 79/1, is science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation. In the Global Digital Compact annexed thereto, Member States recognized the immense potential of artificial intelligence systems to accelerate progress across all the Sustainable Development Goals and committed to advance equitable and inclusive approaches to harnessing artificial intelligence benefits and mitigating risks. In addition, Member States committed to leverage existing United Nations and multi-stakeholder mechanisms to support artificial intelligence capacity-building to bridge artificial intelligence divides, facilitate access to artificial intelligence applications and build capacity in high-performance computing and related skills in developing countries, in view of making progress towards all of the Goals.

27. In the Asia-Pacific region, the artificial intelligence landscape is emerging, with proactive steps being taken in many countries to leverage and adapt to the rapid evolution of artificial intelligence. As the use of artificial intelligence has been rising in sectors and industries such as infrastructure, energy, government and transport, the Governments of several Asia-Pacific countries have defined national strategic plans on artificial intelligence to create favourable policy environments. For the Asia-Pacific region to move from a digital era to an intelligent era, a deeper understanding is required of the opportunities that artificial intelligence presents for accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as of the dynamic risks, net socioeconomic impacts and policy implications.

28. Artificial intelligence has the potential to transform societies and economies, with applications in areas such as industry and jobs, urbanization, rural development, the environment and social development, including for the delivery of social protection and improving the quality of life in an ageing society. However, as artificial intelligence advances, new capabilities and applications emerge. Keeping up with artificial intelligence developments and their implications will be a continuous challenge. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the artificial intelligence divide is rapidly evolving along the same fault

lines as the digital divide – geography, income, education, age and gender – exacerbating disparities within and between countries.

29. In the light of these issues, the proposed theme would present an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the linkages between artificial intelligence and the Sustainable Development Goals in the Asia-Pacific region, what the impacts and implications are and how they can be harnessed for sustainable development.

30. The proposed theme study could help deepen the understanding of: (a) the opportunities provided by artificial intelligence for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, including sectoral applications, use cases and country examples; (b) the socioeconomic impacts of artificial intelligence, as well as existing gaps and digital divides in the region that need to be addressed to ensure that the full potential of artificial intelligence can be harnessed for the achievement of the Goals; and (c) the policy implications of artificial intelligence and actions that could be taken to promote its use for sustainable development. It would be an opportunity to share country experiences and lessons learned, providing valuable insights for strengthened regional cooperation to leverage artificial intelligence for the achievement of the Goals.

31. This proposal is aligned with selected priority areas of the Global Digital Compact, in particular those related to building capacities, especially in developing countries, to access, develop and use artificial intelligence systems and apply them to the pursuit of sustainable development.

32. In the theme study, the secretariat would build on the foundations laid and the findings contained in the theme study for the eightieth session of the Commission.[1] Its work would be guided by the Pact for the Future, the Global Digital Compact and the General Assembly resolutions on seizing the opportunities of safe, secure and trustworthy artificial intelligence systems for sustainable development[2] and on enhancing international cooperation on capacity-building of artificial intelligence.[3]

IV. Previous themes

33. For reference, a list of the themes of previous Commission sessions is contained in the annex to the present document.

V. Issues for consideration by the Commission

34. The Commission may wish to consider the dates and venue of its eighty-second session, to be held in 2026, and to provide the secretariat with guidance in this regard.

35. The Commission may also wish to consider the proposed themes and provide the secretariat with guidance in this regard.

[1] *Seizing the Opportunity: Digital Innovation for a Sustainable Future* (United Nations publication, 2024).

[2] General Assembly resolution 78/265.

[3] General Assembly resolution 78/311.

Annex

List of themes of previous Commission sessions

Session[a]	*Year*	*Theme*
40	1984	Technology for development
41	1985	Technology for development
42	1986	Human resources development
43	1987	Human resources development
44	1988	Human resources development
45	1989	Restructuring the developing ESCAP economies in the 1990s
46	1990	Restructuring the developing ESCAP economies in the 1990s
47	1991	Industrial restructuring in Asia and the Pacific, in particular with a view to strengthening regional cooperation
48	1992	Regional economic cooperation in the ESCAP region: prospects, priorities and policy options
49	1993	Expansion of investment and intraregional trade as a vehicle for enhancing regional economic cooperation and development
50	1994	Infrastructure development as key to economic growth and regional economic cooperation
51	1995	Strengthening of regional cooperation in human resources development with special reference to the social implications of sustainable economic growth in Asia and the Pacific
52	1996	Sustainable development and poverty alleviation in Asia and the Pacific
53	1997	Asia and the Pacific into the twenty-first century: opportunities and challenges for ESCAP
54	1998	Asia and the Pacific into the twenty-first century: status of and prospects for social development
55	1999	Asia and the Pacific into the twenty-first century: information technology, globalization, economic security and development
56	2000	Development through globalization and partnership in the twenty-first century: an Asia-Pacific perspective for integrating developing countries and economies in transition into the international trading system on a fair and equitable basis
57	2001	Balanced development of urban and rural areas and regions within the countries of Asia and the Pacific
58	2002	Sustainable social development in a period of rapid globalization: challenges, opportunities and policy options
59	2003	Integrating economic and social concerns, especially HIV/AIDS, in meeting the needs of the region
60	2004	Meeting the challenges in an era of globalization by strengthening regional development cooperation
61	2005	Implementing the Monterrey Consensus in the Asian and Pacific region: achieving coherence and consistency

Session[a]	*Year*	*Theme*
62	2006	Enhancing regional cooperation in infrastructure development, including that related to disaster management
63	2007	Development of health systems in the context of enhancing economic growth towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific
64	2008	Energy security and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific
65	2009	Towards sustainable agriculture and food security in the Asia-Pacific region
66	2010	Addressing challenges in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals: promoting a stable and supportive financial system; and green growth or environmentally sustainable economic growth, including through technology and financing
67	2011	Beyond the crises: long-term perspectives on social protection and development in Asia and the Pacific
68	2012	Enhancing regional economic integration in Asia and the Pacific
69	2013	Opportunities to build resilience to natural disasters and major economic crises
70	2014	Regional connectivity for shared prosperity
71	2015	Balancing the three dimensions of sustainable development: from integration to implementation
72	2016	Science, technology and innovation for sustainable development
73	2017	Regional cooperation for sustainable energy
74	2018	Inequality in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
75	2019	Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality
76	2020	Promoting economic, social and environmental cooperation on oceans for sustainable development
77	2021	Building back better from crises through regional cooperation in Asia and the Pacific
78	2022	A common agenda to advance sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific
79	2023	Accelerating climate action in Asia and the Pacific for sustainable development
80	2024	Leveraging digital innovation for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific
81	2025	Regional cooperation for resilient and sustainable urban development in Asia and the Pacific

[a] The Commission started choosing theme for its sessions at its fortieth session.