



Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**Seventy-ninth session**

Bangkok and online, 15–19 May 2023

Item 7 of the provisional agenda*

Dates and venue of and theme topic for the eightieth session of the Commission (2024)**Dates and venue of and theme topic for the eightieth session of the Commission (2024)****Note by the secretariat*****Summary*

The present document contains information on the proposed dates and venue of the eightieth session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, to be held in 2024, and a proposal for the theme topic 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 seventy-ninth session on the dates and venue of and theme topic for its eightieth session, to be held in 2024.

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.

* ESCAP/79/1/Rev.2.

** The present document was submitted late owing to the need to take into account the views expressed by the members of the Commission at the meeting of the Informal Working Group on Draft Resolutions held on 4 April 2023.

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 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 2025 before the end of April 2024.

5. The secretariat proposes that the eightieth session of the Commission be held in Bangkok from 22 to 26 April 2024, taking into account also other major meetings and holidays occurring in April 2024.

III. Theme topic

6. It is proposed that the theme topic for the eightieth session be “Leveraging digital innovation for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific”. Background information on the proposed theme topic and a tentative outline of the proposed theme study are provided below.

7. Asia and the Pacific is emerging as a hub of digital innovation for sustainable development. The digital development paradigm is transforming societies and economies at an unprecedented scale. New technologies such as robotics, artificial intelligence and blockchain technology, which are all interconnected, through the Internet of things and through people, have led to sociopolitical and socioeconomic systems becoming digital by default.

8. At the heart of such developments are digital innovation and transformation processes. Digital transformation is about more than digital connectivity and applications; it describes a process by which the social fabric is disrupted by changes in the creation, management, use and distribution of resources brought about by new technologies. As people are provided with improved services, new societal values and demands emerge, which in turn accelerate transformations in value systems and socioeconomic structures.

9. The deployment of advanced digital technologies enhances productivity, optimizes the use of resources, strengthens the competitiveness of trading nations and can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Digital technologies have also resulted in the establishment of social networks that encourage people to use a variety of communication channels to share common interests irrespective of location, thus helping them to stay in touch, broadening their experiences and deepening their knowledge in real time.

10. While the speed of digital transformation in Asia and the Pacific accelerated during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the ensuing changes also intensified pre-existing socioeconomic divides, as many choices suddenly became more binary: people had to interact with the rest of the world digitally, or not at all. Consequently, the digital divide and the deepening of socioeconomic inequities resulting from the digital by default paradigm became much more conspicuous during pandemic lockdowns. In fact, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific has shown that Asia and the Pacific is now the most digitally divided region of the world.¹ Notably,

¹ *Asia-Pacific Digital Transformation Report 2022: Shaping Our Digital Future* (Bangkok, 2022).

older persons, persons with disabilities and women, particularly those in rural areas, are less likely to have access to new technologies or the knowledge to use them effectively.

11. With such opportunities and challenges in mind, there is a time-bound window of opportunity for policymakers in Asia and the Pacific to leverage digital innovation in the most productive and inclusive ways possible for accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

12. In the declaration on the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations,² Heads of State and Government recognized that digital technologies had a potential to accelerate the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and resolved to ensure safe and affordable digital access for all. In that same declaration, they made 12 commitments, the seventh of which was to improve digital cooperation. In that context, they recognized that the United Nations could provide a platform for all stakeholders to participate in such deliberations. In his report entitled “Our Common Agenda”,³ the Secretary-General reiterated the commitment to improve digital cooperation made in the declaration and emphasized the need to achieve universal access to and avoid the fragmentation of the Internet, protect personal data and reclaim the digital commons.

13. In its resolution 78/1, entitled “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”, the Commission committed itself to improving digital cooperation and expressed the intention to cooperate in closing the digital connectivity divide, ensuring digital skills training, strengthening digital connectivity, addressing digital trust and security and promoting an inclusive digital economy and society.

14. Building on these commitments, the proposed theme for the eightieth session of the Commission would facilitate a regional policy dialogue and the sharing of successful country experiences and regulatory policies and strengthen region-wide cooperative action on leveraging digital innovation for the accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The study to be prepared by the secretariat would highlight the key regional characteristics of present and future digital trends in the context of the 2030 Agenda and propose elements of a framework on digital innovation for sustainable development. Digital innovation and sustainable development interact in a number of ways. A framework is needed to better understand the direct and indirect interlinkages between different actors, including governments, businesses and other relevant stakeholders, on promoting and strengthening digital innovation for sustainable development.

15. The study would also contain a review of emerging practices at the country, subregional and regional levels to increase understanding of how digital innovation can accelerate sustainable development across various sectors. Such practices may include: innovative business models; inclusive financing initiatives; climate-smart infrastructure projects for resource-efficient energy grids and transport corridors; and climate adaptation measures that include analyses of big data aimed at achieving early warnings for all.

² General Assembly resolution 75/1.

³ A/75/982.

16. Building on the practices identified, the study would also contain an analysis of what constitutes an enabling environment for implementing and scaling up high-impact good practices and suggestions for how best to provide:

(a) Stable and predictable policy environments that would facilitate greater investment in digital innovation and adaptation and promote digital inclusion;

(b) Regulatory reforms that promote innovation and recalibrate investment risks, including financing innovations;

(c) Capacity-building programmes and projects focused on wide-ranging opportunities emerging not only from traditional projects led by public institutions but also from bottom-up, community initiatives driven by the private sector, as well as blended approaches.

17. The study would present information on how various regional cooperation initiatives and platforms supported by the Commission can accelerate digital innovation for sustainable development in a world that is increasingly digital by default.

IV. Previous theme topics

18. For reference, a list of the theme topics of previous Commission sessions is contained in the annex to the present document.

V. Issues for consideration by the Commission

19. The Commission may wish to consider the dates and venue of its eightieth session, to be held in 2024, and to provide the secretariat with guidance in this regard.

20. The Commission may also wish to consider the proposed theme topic “Leveraging digital innovation for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific” and the outline of the proposed theme study.

Annex

List of theme topics of previous Commission sessions

<i>Session^a</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Theme topic</i>
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

<i>Session^a</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Theme topic</i>
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

^a The Commission started choosing theme topics for its sessions at its fortieth session.