



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
14 October 2022

Original: English

---

## Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Third Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation  
and Integration in Asia and the Pacific

Bangkok and online, 28–30 September 2022

### Report on the Third Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific

#### I. Matters calling for action by the Commission

1. The following recommendation made at the Third Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific is brought to the attention of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific for its consideration and possible action:

##### Recommendation

The participants in the Third Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific recommend that, in line with resolution 74/10 of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific of 16 May 2018, priority should continue to be accorded to enhancing economic cooperation and integration in Asia and the Pacific in the programme of work of the Commission and through its conference structure.

#### II. Organization

##### A. Opening, duration and organization of the Ministerial Conference

2. The Ministerial Conference, which was held in Bangkok and online from 28 to 30 September 2022, was opened by the Executive Secretary of the Commission. Mr. Woonchong Um, Managing Director General of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and Mr. Biswo Nath Poudel, Vice-Chair of the National Planning Commission of Nepal, also made statements.

##### B. Attendance

3. Representatives of the following members and associate members of the Commission attended: Armenia; Australia; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; China; Democratic People's Republic of Korea; France; Georgia; India; Indonesia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Kazakhstan; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Malaysia; Maldives; Mongolia; Nauru; Nepal; Pakistan; Philippines; Republic of Korea;

Russian Federation; Sri Lanka; Thailand; Timor-Leste; United States of America; Uzbekistan; and Viet Nam.

4. Representatives of the following Permanent Observers to the Commission also attended: Belgium; Finland; Germany; Guatemala; Hungary; Slovakia; and Switzerland.

5. Representatives of the United Nations Environment Programme attended.

6. Representatives of the following United Nations bodies, specialized agencies and funds also attended: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; International Labour Organization; International Telecommunication Union; United Nations Industrial Development Organization; and World Meteorological Organization.

7. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations also attended: ADB; Commonwealth of Independent States Executive Committee; Economic Cooperation Organization; Eurasian Economic Commission; International Transport Forum; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat; South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation; and Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia.

8. In accordance with rule 12 of the Commission's rules of procedure, the bureau examined the credentials of representatives of member States and reported upon them to the participants in the Ministerial Conference. The credentials of the representatives of 31 member States were found to be in order. The bureau decided to defer any action on the credentials pertaining to the representatives of Myanmar at the Ministerial Conference, pending a decision by the General Assembly on the representation of Myanmar and in line with General Assembly resolution 396 (V) of 14 December 1950, and acknowledging the report of the Credentials Committee of the General Assembly at its seventy-sixth session.

9. The participants in the Ministerial Conference took note of the oral report of the bureau on credentials.

### **C. Election of officers**

10. The participants in the Ministerial Conference elected the following officers:

Chair:	Mr. Loknath Sharma (Bhutan)
Vice-Chairs:	Mr. Munkhjin Batsumber (Mongolia)
	Mr. Arman Issetov (Kazakhstan)
	Mr. Fakhriddin Sultanov (Uzbekistan)

### **D. Agenda**

11. The participants in the Ministerial Conference adopted the following agenda:

1. Opening of the Ministerial Conference:
  - (a) Opening statements;
  - (b) Election of officers;
  - (c) Adoption of the agenda.

2. Building resilience to crises through regional economic cooperation and integration:
  - (a) Strengthening resilience through trade and investment for sustainable development in times of crisis;
  - (b) Strengthening resilience through seamless and sustainable connectivity;
  - (c) Towards an inclusive digital future.
3. Other matters.
4. Adoption of the report on the Third Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific.

#### **E. Other events**

12. The following side events were held in conjunction with the Ministerial Conference:

- (a) 29 September 2022, “Cooperation of the banking sector and businesses of the Russian Federation and the Asia-Pacific region within the framework of the sustainable development agenda”;
- (b) 30 September 2022, “National perspectives and experiences on cross-sectoral infrastructure sharing for broadband connectivity”;
- (c) 30 September 2022, “Towards a forward-looking agenda for sustainable interregional transport linkages between Central and South Asia”;
- (d) 30 September 2022, “Implementing digital identity systems without leaving anyone behind”;
- (e) 30 September 2022, “The United Nations model chapter on trade in crisis situations in regional trade agreements”;
- (f) 30 September 2022, “Powering the digital economy: policy approaches to foster innovation and regional integration”, co-hosted with ADB;
- (g) 30 September 2022, Launch of the *2022 Regional Trends Report: Towards Sustainable Energy Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific*;
- (h) 30 September 2022, “Cross-border e-payments”;
- (i) 30 September 2022, “An integrated approach to trade and transport facilitation”, co-hosted with ADB;
- (j) 30 September 2022, “Promoting intraregional foreign direct investment in States members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations”.

### **III. Account of proceedings**

13. The discussions held during the Ministerial Conference have been summarized in an account of proceedings (see annex II).

## Annex I

### List of documents

<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Agenda item</i>
<i>General series</i>		
ESCAP/MCREI/2022/1	Emerging from recent crises: understanding the macroeconomic context	2
ESCAP/MCREI/2022/2	Enabling trade and investment for sustainable development in times of crisis	2 (a)
ESCAP/MCREI/2022/3	Enabling resilience through sustainable and seamless connectivity	2 (b)
ESCAP/MCREI/2022/4	Towards an inclusive digital future	2 (c)
ESCAP/MCREI/2022/5	Report on the Third Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific	
<i>Limited series</i>		
ESCAP/MCREI/2022/L.1	Provisional agenda	1 (c)
ESCAP/MCREI/2022/L.2	Annotated provisional agenda	1 (c)
ESCAP/MCREI/2022/L.3	Draft report	4
<i>Information available online</i>		
<a href="http://www.unescap.org/events/reci-2022">www.unescap.org/events/reci-2022</a>	Information for participants	
<a href="http://www.unescap.org/events/reci-2022">www.unescap.org/events/reci-2022</a>	List of participants	
<a href="http://www.unescap.org/events/reci-2022">www.unescap.org/events/reci-2022</a>	Tentative programme	

## Annex II

### Account of proceedings

#### I. Introduction

1. The account of proceedings contains a summary of the discussions and proceedings of the Third Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific.

2. Members and associate members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, international organizations and other stakeholders engaged in a dialogue on how regional economic cooperation and integration, through market integration, seamless and sustainable connectivity and an inclusive digital future, could help to address the multiple challenges countries in the region face.

3. The present annex contains a succinct summary of the converging views expressed by participants at the Ministerial Conference and does not elaborate on the details of any country statement. The country statements, as delivered during the Conference, are published on its website ([www.unescap.org/events/reci-2022](http://www.unescap.org/events/reci-2022)) for ease of reference for all participants.

#### II. Summary of discussions

##### A. Building resilience to crises through regional economic cooperation and integration (agenda item 2)

4. The Conference had before it the note by the secretariat entitled “Emerging from recent crises: understanding the macroeconomic context” (ESCAP/MCREI/2022/1).

5. Technical presentations were delivered by the secretariat and the Asian Development Bank on the near-term macroeconomic challenges in the region and areas where regional economic cooperation and integration could support a robust and resilient economic recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The region’s economic rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic entailed multiple short- and long-term challenges, while regional economic cooperation and integration remained resilient and strong. Regional economic cooperation and integration could play an important role in supporting a robust and resilient economic recovery in Asia and the Pacific by strengthening integrated regional markets and supply chains, promoting digital connectivity and technology, supporting vulnerable countries through health and financial cooperation, and facilitating collective responses to shared challenges such as climate change and tax base erosion.

##### B. Strengthening resilience through trade and investment for sustainable development in times of crisis (agenda item 2 (a))

6. The participants had before them the note by the secretariat on enabling trade and investment for sustainable development in times of crisis (ESCAP/MCREI/2022/2).

7. Mr. Loknath Sharma, Minister of Economic Affairs, Bhutan, and Mr. Shri Suman Bery, Vice-Chair, National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), delivered keynote addresses.

8. A panel discussion was held to discuss how regional market integration through trade and investment could help to build resilience in supply chains. Panellists highlighted that the uptake of digital technologies in international trade procedures had improved the resilience of supply chains during the pandemic. Panellists recognized the importance of regional cooperation in strengthening economic recovery and building resilience to future shocks and emphasized the need to engage the private sector.

9. Representatives of the following members and associate members of the Commission made statements: Bangladesh; Brunei Darussalam; China; India; Japan; Pakistan; Russian Federation; and United States of America.

10. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations made statements: Economic Cooperation Organization; and Eurasian Economic Commission.

11. The importance of regional cooperation, through trade and investment to support resilience and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, was noted.

12. The following areas should be further supported: customs and border clearance procedures for paperless cross-border trade and harmonization of international standards and inclusive platforms catering to small and medium-sized enterprises and women entrepreneurs.

13. The importance of multilateralism and regional cooperation was underscored. One representative noted their importance in the context of overcoming geopolitical tensions in order to address food security and energy connectivity. One representative noted the importance of public-private partnerships, while another highlighted the importance of a green development agenda and the importance of trade in environmentally friendly goods.

14. Representatives of international organizations spoke about regional cooperation efforts to overcome challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic; given those efforts, the introduction of new clauses in trade agreements encompassing emergency measures such as expeditious clearance of critical items could be considered. The importance of digital technologies and their ability to make trade more inclusive and resilient was also highlighted.

**C. Strengthening resilience through seamless and sustainable connectivity (agenda item 2 (b))**

15. The participants had before them the note by the secretariat on enabling resilience through sustainable and seamless connectivity (ESCAP/MCREI/2022/3).

16. Mr. Ngampasong Muongmany, Vice-Minister, Ministry of Public Works and Transport, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mr. Jasurbek Choriyeu, Deputy Minister of Transport, Uzbekistan, and Mr. Bayarmagnai Myagmarsuren, Vice-Minister, Ministry of Energy, Mongolia, delivered keynote addresses. Mr. Péter Szijjártó, Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Hungary, delivered a special address.

17. A panel discussion was held to share how regional cooperation could improve transport, energy and digital connectivity in the region, while building resilience to crises and enabling climate action. Panellists highlighted recent achievements in those areas and underlined the role of regional cooperation initiatives with a focus on ongoing digitalization and decarbonization efforts.

The disruption to the trade and supply chains between Europe and Asia and rising energy prices due to the ongoing geopolitical tensions were discussed.

18. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; China; India; Indonesia; Pakistan; Russian Federation; and Uzbekistan.

19. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations made statements: Economic Cooperation Organization; International Transport Forum; and Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia.

20. Significant national efforts to develop transport infrastructure and promote international transport corridors for regional transport connectivity were discussed.

21. The central role of the Intergovernmental Agreements on the Asian Highway Network, the Trans-Asian Railway Network and Dry Ports for coordinated development of regional multimodal transport networks was recognized and the need to prioritize further development of multimodal transport corridors, expand the role of international rail transport and continue digitalization and facilitation of freight transport operations was emphasized.

22. The importance of subregional integration mechanisms and initiatives, as well as bilateral and multilateral cooperation on road transport, was acknowledged. In that context, participants were also informed of the current issues and ongoing work of global and regional intergovernmental organizations, such as the Economic Cooperation Organization, the International Transport Forum and the Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia.

23. In the context of energy connectivity, participants were informed about the effects of rising energy prices on national economies and energy security. Net-zero and renewable energy targets were discussed, as well as efforts to further develop domestic power generation resources, including renewable energy. The importance of regional connectivity in the power sector as an enabler of renewable energy trade and in meeting national sustainability targets was discussed.

24. Regional initiatives aimed at energy connectivity in South Asia, North-East Asia and South-East Asia were discussed.

25. One representative noted the importance of critical minerals which were necessary for the global energy transition.

26. The secretariat's role in supporting power system connectivity, including through the Regional Road Map on Power System Connectivity: Promoting Cross-border Electricity Connectivity for Sustainable Development, was acknowledged.

27. With regard to digital connectivity, the importance of regional cooperation for an inclusive digital economy and society was highlighted and the role of regional cooperation mechanisms, including the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative, in enhancing digital infrastructure connectivity, digital skills and capacity, digital and personal data protection, digital trade, digital finance, digital identity, digital inclusion, and digital services and logistics was emphasized.

28. The need to share best practices with regard to digital skills development to bridge the digital divide, including activities for youth, women, girls and persons with specific needs, in order to transform the knowledge-based society to an intelligent information society was emphasized.

**D. Towards an inclusive digital future (agenda item 2 (c))**

29. The participants had before them the note by the secretariat entitled “Towards an inclusive digital future” (ESCAP/MCREI/2022/4).

30. Mr. Mussin Bagdat, Minister of Digital Development, Innovation and Aerospace Industry, Kazakhstan, Mr. Ariff Ali, Governor of the Reserve Bank of Fiji, Mr. Newin Chochaiyathip, Vice-Minister for Digital Economy and Society, Thailand, Mr. Park Yun-Kyu, Vice-Minister of Science and Information and Communications Technology, Republic of Korea, and Ms. Mira Tayyiba, Chair of the Group of 20 Digital Economy Working Group, and Secretary-General, Ministry of Communications and Informatics, Indonesia, delivered keynote addresses.

31. A panel discussion was held on digital transformation, digital inclusion, digital technology start-ups and foreign direct investment in the digital economy. Panellists noted that the technology start-up industry had helped to provide access to basic services such as health and education, especially during the pandemic, while often also being gender inclusive and generating employment for young professionals. Panellists emphasized that governments and investment promotion agencies had an important role to play in enabling and internationalizing technology start-up ecosystems and that international organizations could support them by providing strategic advice, mentoring programmes and digital skill training programmes. Panellists underscored the importance of regional cooperation to facilitate cross-border foreign direct investment supporting digital development, sharing of best practices and harmonization of policies.

32. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; China; India; Kazakhstan; Mongolia; Pakistan; Philippines; and United States of America.

33. A statement was also made by the representative of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

34. The importance of deepening regional cooperation in order to bridge digital divides, harness cross-border foreign direct investment in the digital economy and leverage opportunities for digital transformation and economic growth in Asia and the Pacific was highlighted.

35. The COVID-19 pandemic had accelerated the digital transformation under way in the region and digital infrastructure and secure and affordable digital services were indispensable for inclusive digital transformations.

36. The importance of regional cooperation and multilateralism to support an inclusive digital future was recognized. In that regard, it was important to promote sharing of best practices for an inclusive digital future.

37. One representative noted the importance of using digital start-ups during the pandemic to better distribute aid.



38. The secretariat's work on the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative was recognized as essential to supporting a better-connected world. Appreciation was also expressed for training courses delivered by the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development.

**E. Other matters (agenda item 3)**

39. No other matters were discussed under this agenda item.

**F. Adoption of the report on the Third Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific (agenda item 4)**

40. The report was adopted on 30 September 2022.

---