

Asia-Pacific Economic
Cooperation

APEC



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APEC PERU 2016

**Asia-Pacific
Economic Cooperation**



MUNUC 37

Model United Nations of the University of Chicago

CHAIR LETTERS

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) at MUNUC 37! My name is Daniela Rivera Solano, and I will be serving as one of your co-chairs for this committee.

To introduce myself further, I am a fourth year at UChicago double majoring in Political Science and Human Rights. I am originally from New Jersey. This will be my fourth year staffing MUNUC. I am also involved in ChoMUN, our college conference. Outside of MUN, I am involved in various activities. Previously serving as its president, I am actively engaged in MECHA, a Latin American student activist organization on campus. I also love everything related to art and have recently started venturing into pottery.

This year APEC will focus on two topics relevant to international economic and environmental policy. We will discuss ways to promote economic growth while respecting environmental and international human rights laws and explore the transition from fossil fuels to green energy. We look forward to hearing your discussions regarding these topics, as they are relevant and address various climate concerns through economic means, and can't wait to see how you navigate economic, social, and political constraints in the region.

In the months leading up to the conference, we urge you to review the background guide and continue further research on themes related to the two topics that interest you to better prepare for the weekend ahead. Carina, Fawwaz, and I are excited to support you before and throughout the conference and will answer any questions you may have via email before the conference. At the start of the conference, we will go over how to give speeches, work in groups, write resolutions, and other necessary skills to ensure everyone feels prepared and empowered to participate!

With that being said, we look forward to your contributions to this committee and hope to make this a memorable and successful MUN experience for all!

Best,

Daniela Rivera Solano

danielar@uchicago.edu

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) at MUNUC 37. My name is Carina Villalona, and I will be one of your co-chairs. For some information about me: I am a 3rd-year Political Science Student at the University of Chicago. This is my first year staffing for MUNUC, but I served as an assistant chair last year for the JCC: Ford vs Ferrari at UChicago's collegiate conference, CHOMUN. This year I will also be serving as a crisis director at CHOMUN for the JCC: The War of Actium. Outside of MUN, I am an associate with the non-profit consulting group, The Phoenix Development Fund, a member of the Filipino cultural organization, Kababayan, and a volunteer for the Student Philanthropy Committee.

This committee will center around topics of fostering sustainable economic growth and energy transition. I look forward to witnessing debate about how best to address these issues cooperatively as different member states of APEC while also protecting distinct national interests.

While discussing these subjects, we want to stress the importance of maintaining sensitivity regarding serious matters and respect for your fellow delegates. A firm reminder that we have a zero tolerance policy for any speech or behavior that is racist, sexist, homophobic, or misogynistic, both within and outside of committee sessions. Any delegate found in violation of MUNUC's policies will be disciplined accordingly. If you are unsure whether any particular content would be deemed appropriate for the committee, you are welcome to ask me or my co-chair at any point.

We hope that each and every one of you will have an engaging, educational, and memorable experience with this committee. We're looking forward to meeting you all in February! Let's make this committee a great one.

Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions!

Sincerely,

Carina Villalona

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HISTORY OF THE COMMITTEE:

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is an intergovernmental forum consisting of 21 member economies from the Pacific Rim, dedicated to promoting free trade across the Asia-Pacific region and creating greater prosperity for the people of the region by promoting balanced, inclusive, sustainable, innovative and secure growth and by accelerating regional economic integration.¹ APEC ensures that goods, services, investments, and people move easily across borders as members facilitate trade through faster customs procedures at borders; more favorable business climates behind the border; and aligning regulations and standards across the region.²

The organization was established in 1989 after the success of ASEAN's post-ministerial conferences in the mid-1980s, as a response to the increasing interdependence of Asia-Pacific economies and the formation of regional trade blocs in other parts of the world.³ The idea of APEC was first publicly broached by the former prime minister of Australia, Bob Hawke, during a speech in Seoul in 1989, before 12 Asia-Pacific economies met in Canberra to establish APEC ten months later.⁴ The founding members consisted of Australia; Brunei Darussalam; Canada; Indonesia; Japan; Korea; Malaysia; New Zealand; the Philippines; Singapore; Thailand; and the United States.⁵ Nine other members joined in consecutive years, from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan joining in 1991 to most recently in 1998 when Peru, Russia, and Vietnam joined, taking the full membership to 21.⁶

¹ APEC, "About APEC," APEC, January 2024, <https://www.apec.org/about-us/about-apec>.

² *Ibid.*

³ Eduardo Pedrosa and Andrew Elek, "Back to Canberra: Founding APEC," essay, in *The Evolution of PECC: The First 25 Years* (Singapore, Singapore: PECC, 2005), 65–85.

⁴ APEC, "History," APEC, October 2023, <https://www.apec.org/about-us/about-apec/history>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

APEC met as an informal senior official- and ministerial-level dialogue before former US President Bill Clinton established the practice of an annual APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in 1993 to provide greater strategic vision and direction for cooperation in the region.⁷

Headquartered in Singapore, APEC has the main goal of opening new markets for agricultural products and raw materials outside of Europe and is one of the oldest and most influential multilateral organizations in the Asia-Pacific region.⁸ It has helped its members and constituents promote regional economic integration and trade, make trade and business across borders easier, implement faster customs procedures, increase energy efficiency and introduce renewables, nurture small businesses, and enhance social equity in the Asia Pacific region through structural reforms, the APEC business travel card, the APEC supply chain connectivity, an environmental goods list, and green towns in the Asia-Pacific.⁹

In APEC, all members have an equal say, and decision-making is reached by consensus with no binding commitments or treaty obligations as commitments are undertaken on a voluntary basis, and capacity-building projects help members implement APEC initiatives.¹⁰ APEC's structure is based on both a "bottom-up" and "top-down" approach, with four core committees and their respective working groups providing strategic policy recommendations to APEC leaders and ministers who annually set the vision for overarching goals and initiatives.¹¹ Members also take individual and collective actions to carry out APEC initiatives in their individual economies with the assistance of APEC capacity-building projects.¹² The heads of government from all APEC members, except Taiwan (which is represented by a ministerial-level official as its economic leader), attend the annual APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting that is hosted in different member countries rotated yearly.¹³ APEC has three official observers: the Association of Southeast Asian

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Shulong Chu, "The East Asia Summit: Looking for an Identity," *Brookings Institution*, February 1, 2007, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-east-asia-summit-looking-for-an-identity/>.

⁹ APEC, "Achievements and Benefits," APEC, October 2023, <https://www.apec.org/about-us/about-apec/achievements-and-benefits>.

¹⁰ APEC, "About APEC," APEC, January 2024, <https://www.apec.org/about-us/about-apec>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

Nations Secretariat (ASEAN), the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC), and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF).¹⁴

¹⁴ APEC, “APEC Observers,” APEC, October 2023, <https://www.apec.org/About-Us/How-APEC-Operates/APEC-Observers>.

TOPIC A: BALANCING ECONOMIC GROWTH WITH HUMAN RIGHTS AND CONSERVATION

Statement of the Problem

Human Rights Abuses

Economic growth is a core goal that countries continuously strive toward to enhance their long-term stability and global influence. However, the blind pursuit of this goal without regard for human rights is an ever-present phenomenon that must be addressed by national representatives and policymakers around the world. In the Asia-Pacific region in particular, human rights have been negatively impacted by unsustainable economic growth. When profits become prioritized above all else, the focus on ensuring essential rights for citizens such as access to liveable wages, safe working conditions, and quality education and healthcare become sidelined. More than 2.1 billion workers in Asia and the Pacific are currently denied access to satisfactory jobs, health care, and social protection, with 243 million new people falling into poverty during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even prior to the pandemic, this issue was already longstanding, with half of all people in the region living without cash, a third without necessary medicine and medical treatments, and a quarter without enough food to survive.¹⁵ While policies promoting these rights may seem costly to some leaders from an economic perspective, workers with these rights protected tend to become more innovative and productive, allowing the national economy to grow in a healthy manner that benefits the population as a whole. Explained below are several crises caused by clear neglect of human rights responsibilities that currently plague the Asia-Pacific region as a result of unstable economic growth.

Poor Labor Conditions:

Many Asian countries have maintained a competitive advantage in the global marketplace by driving down wages and working conditions. Workers are often denied freedom of association and the right

¹⁵ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. "The Right Policies Can Protect Workers in Asia and the Pacific." ESCAP. <https://www.unescap.org/op-ed/right-policies-can-protect-workers-asia-and-pacific>.

to organize and bargain collectively, with migrant workers often facing deportation risk. Sweatshops are crowded workplaces with poor or illegal working conditions that are used to cheaply mass produce goods. In these sweatshops, workers, who can be as young as 12, get ¹⁶ paid next to nothing and suffered frequent injuries. These factories are commonplace in China, with 36% of the population living on what would equate to less than two dollars a day¹⁷. These conditions are also frequently seen in other Asian countries, such as South Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and India.

Many significant global corporations also have a reported history of relying on sweatshop labor for the production of their products, such as Nike, Shein, Temu, and Apple. Companies that use these practices continue to fuel global economies, including in the Asia Pacific region, facing no repercussions for engaging in unjust labor practices and human rights abuses.



Wealth Disparity

Another significant problem that affects the Asia-Pacific region is the mass amount of economic inequality, with the richest citizens accumulating wealth at the expense of the poorest. Asia still has close to 700 million poor people, forming around 65% of the world's poor. These people live on the equivalent of less than \$1.25 a day, while almost two thirds of the new wealth created between December 2019 and December 2021 went to the richest 1% of the population.¹⁸ Over the last two decades the richest 10% of

¹⁶ Flickr. "Photo by User 28876688@N03." <https://www.flickr.com/photos/28876688@N03/2696481591>.

¹⁷ War on Want. "Sweatshops in China." <https://waronwant.org/news-analysis/sweatshops-china>.

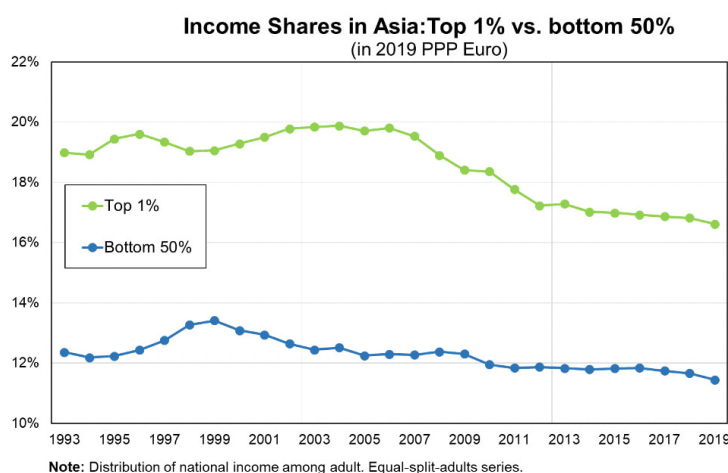
¹⁸International Monetary Fund (IMF). "IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde Welcomes the Swiss National Bank's Decision to Establish a Negative Interest Rate." Last modified May 29, 2014. <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2015/09/28/04/53/sores052914a>.

the population in China, Indonesia, Laos, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have seen their income shares increase by over 15%, while the poorest 10% have seen their income shares fall by more than 15%.¹⁹

As 59 countries have been facing unsustainable debt levels as of 2022,²⁰ extensive austerity measures are being put into place by leaders, which are estimated to impact around 85% of the global population. This detracts from the ability of governments to adequately invest in necessary public services such as education,²¹ healthcare, and food security, which are essential human rights that many impoverished citizens currently lack access to, especially in the Asia-Pacific region.²²

Gendered Inequality

A significant amount of the inequality experienced in this region occurs across gendered lines. According to statistics, countries that face the highest income inequality additionally face the higher rates of gender inequality. Across Asia, women's wages fall between 70-90% of that of men's, largely due to a combination of direct discrimination and a higher concentration of women working in lower paying fields. In India in particular, women are paid a third less on average than men, and



¹⁹ Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). 2006 Socio-Economic Disparity in the APEC Region. November 2006. https://www.apec.org/docs/default-source/publications/2006/11/2006-socio-economic-disparity-in-the-apec-region/06_ec_socio.pdf.

²⁰ World Inequality Database (WID). "What's New About Income Inequality Data in Asia?". <https://wid.world/news-article/whats-new-about-income-inequality-data-in-asia/>.

²¹ ResearchGate. "Income Inequality Across the Asia-Pacific Region. Source: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)". https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Income-inequality-across-the-Asia-Pacific-region-Source-United-Nations-Development_fig1_373000583.

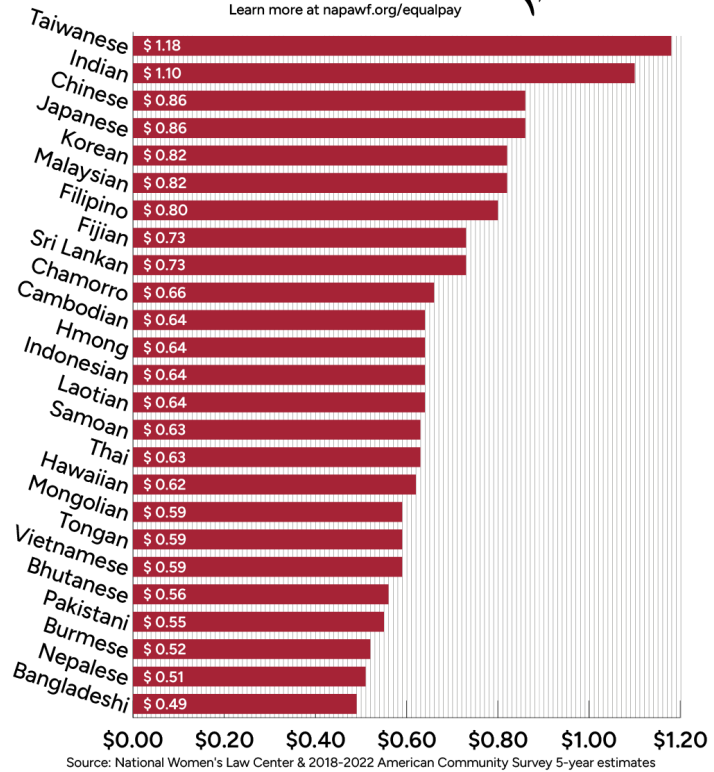
²² Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Background Document: Human Rights and the Economy, 2023. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/udhr/publishingimages/75udhr/HR75-high-level-event-Economy-Background-document.pdf>.

in Bangladesh women earn 23% less per hour than men for the same jobs.²³ Additionally, female workers carry out around 2.5 times the amount of unpaid care work that men do, are often denied benefits like sick pay, are forced to work long hours in unsafe conditions, and are frequently²⁴ subject to sexual harassment in the workplace. According to trends investigated by the World Economic Forum based on the current rate of social and economic progress, it would take 62 years in South Asia, 128 years in Central Asia, and 161 years in East Asia and the Pacific in order to finally close the deeply entrenched gender wage gap in these regions.²⁵ Collaborative action by state leaders in this region that addresses the issue of gender-based economic inequality directly will be necessary in order to pursue economic growth in a manner consistent with promoting and protecting human rights.

The Wage Gap for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Women



Learn more at napawf.org/equalpay



²³ Oxfam. "Sweatshop Wages and Unpaid Care Work: The Double Burden on Asia's Women as Its Economy Booms." Last modified October 4, 2016. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/sweatshop-wages-and-unpaid-care-work-double-burden-asias-women-its-economy-booms>.

²⁴ National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF). "Equal Pay for AANHPI Women." <https://napawf.org/equalpay/>.

²⁵ MarketWatch. "This Is When American Women Will Finally Be Paid as Much as Men." Last modified September 1, 2016. <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/this-is-when-american-women-will-finally-be-paid-as-much-as-men-2016-09-1>.

Conservation

In addition to human rights concerns, unsustainable economic growth poses significant challenges toward environmental conservation efforts. These negative environmental impacts include the destruction of wildlife habitats through damage to marine ecosystems and deforestation. These effects greatly contribute to the extinction of species, in addition to causing harm to indigenous populations who reside around these lands and waters.

Environmental Damage

There is an inherent link between environmental pollution and economic growth, shown by a rise of per capita pollution of 66% between 1960 and 2014²⁶, accompanied by concurrent economic growth from 12% of global GDP to almost a third during this time period.²⁷ Habitats such as marine ecosystems face mass degradation due to pollution. This has led to increased salinization of the water, which negatively impacts land quality, the cleanliness of drinking water, and the wellbeing of fish populations, which Asia-Pacific countries rely upon.²⁸ Additionally, as mass consumption increases as the economy grows, natural resources like forests face a drastic decline due to deforestation promoted by business interests. Increased consumption has also led to ²⁹occurrences such as overfishing, which has contributed to a loss in fish stocks and an overall decline in biodiversity.

²⁶ Economics Help. "Environmental Impact of Economic Growth." Last modified April 4, 2019. <https://www.economicshelp.org/blog/145989/economics/environmental-impact-of-economic-growth/#:~:text=Therefore%2C%20with%20increased%20output%20and,potential%20loss%20of%20environmental%20habitats.>

²⁷ Asian Development Bank (ADB). "Data Show 50 Years of Changing Asia." Last modified September 24, 2016. <https://www.adb.org/news/infographics/data-show-50-years-changing-asia#:~:text=SHARE%20THIS%20PAGE,nearly%20half%20the%20global%20total.>

²⁸ Air University. "Blue Economy in the Indo-Pacific: The Need to Create a Cooperative Framework." Last modified July 31, 2023. [https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/3703814/blue-economy-in-the-indo-pacific-the-need-to-create-a-cooperative-framework/.](https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/3703814/blue-economy-in-the-indo-pacific-the-need-to-create-a-cooperative-framework/)

²⁹ Rawpixel. "Polluted River." Accessed August 24, 2024. https://www.rawpixel.com/search/polluted%20river?page=1&path=_topics&sort=curated.

Effects On Indigenous Communities

These environmental effects fueled by unsustainable economic growth spill over to create an adverse effect on indigenous populations. Deforestation affects the cultural identity of these communities, as their sacred sites are often demolished. Indigenous groups are also forced³⁰ into poverty and become more vulnerable to diseases when forests are destroyed, as this leads to a loss of their means of subsistence and natural medicine. Several of the tribes within the Asia-Pacific region that have already encountered this fate due to industrial projects like logging and mining include the Penan Tribe in Borneo, Malaysia and the Gond Tribes of Chhattisgarh, India.³¹

Rapid and unsustainable economic growth brings disastrous consequences to the people and ecosystems of the Asia-Pacific region, including unethical labor conditions, mass inequality, and environmental damage. These pressing issues each must be collaboratively and directly addressed over the course of the committee to ensure that the region's people and land are protected in the way they need to be.

History of the Problem

The economic growth of the Asia-Pacific region is one of the largest and fastest growing in the world. In 2021, the region boasted a combined GDP of \$52.8 trillion USD, 33.8 trillion more than 3 decades ago when APEC was first formed.³² This massive growth has proven to be beneficial for the 21 member states of APEC, which are home to approximately 2.95 billion people. The creation of APEC and economic growth of the region has opened doors for better diplomatic and economic relations between the member countries and is something that will continue to be prioritized by national governments. While economic

³⁰ Wikipedia. "File: Deforestation in Cambodia1.jpg".

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Deforestation_in_Cambodia1.jpg.

³¹ Earth.org. "The Silent Cry of the Forest: How Deforestation Impacts Indigenous Communities." *Earth.org*.<https://earth.org/the-silent-cry-of-the-forest-how-deforestation-impacts-indigenous-communities/>.

³² APEC. "2006 Socio-Economic Disparity in the APEC Region." *APEC*, November 2006.

https://www.apec.org/docs/default-source/publications/2006/11/2006-socio-economic-diparity-in-the-apec-region/06_ec_socio.pdf.

growth is important, APEC leaders are also trying to promote sustainable, inclusive, and fair practices so that this growth is palpable to all.³³

Economic Growth

During the Second World War from 1936 to 1945, the Asia-Pacific region was riddled with conflict; this resulted in its people and economies taking a massive hit. Most member countries were left devastated and impoverished. They had to regrow and in most cases reinvent their economies in the decades that followed after.

Japan rebuilt their economy with speed and efficiency, following the end of the Second World War. Behind Japan followed the four Asian Tigers: South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong.³⁴ On average, between 1950 to 1997, their economies grew roughly 6 percent each year. This was “nearly twice as fast as the rest of the world and more than 1½ times faster than the United States.”³⁵ Prior to the Second World War, most countries in the Asia Pacific region had economies centered around agriculture. Prominent crops included rice paddies, natural rubber, wheat, tea leaves, coffee, palm oil, sugar cane.³⁶ The region

³³ Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, “Aotearoa Plan of Action,” Aotearoa Plan of Action, accessed August 27, 2024, <https://aotearoaplanofaction.apec.org/strong-balanced-secure-sustainable-and-inclusive-growth.html>

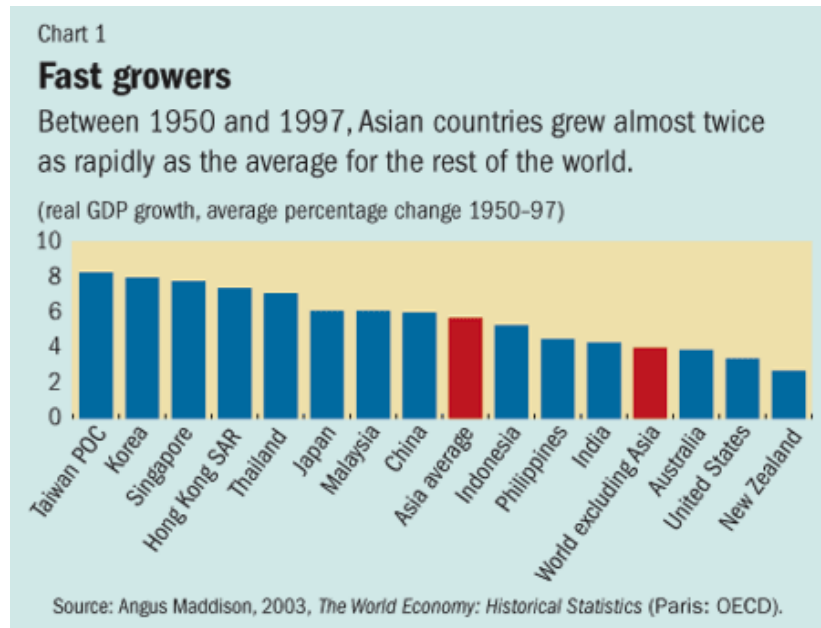
³⁴ Dong-Ching Day, “Four Asian Tigers’ Political and Economic Development Revisited 1998-2017: From the Perspective of National Identity,” *Asian Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, 2021, <https://journals.asianresassoc.org/index.php/ajir>.

³⁵ Edwin M. Truman, “A Strategy for IMF Reform,” *Finance & Development* 43, no. 2 (2006): <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2006/06/burton.htm>.

³⁶ “Asia - Agriculture,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, last modified March 31, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Asia/Agriculture>.

continues to produce these profitable cash crops but industrialized following the end of the Second World War and transitioned its focus on to labor-intensive manufacturing.

This transition was spearheaded by Japan, which adopted *Shokusan-kogyo seisaku*, an economic policy which encouraged “new industries as a means of catching up with the ‘advanced’ states in the West.”³⁷ Though this economic policy was established during the Meiji Restoration in 1868, it only spread throughout the region after



1945. Its spread can be attributed to Japan’s numerous territorial conquests over the Asia-Pacific and to the lack of natural resources and emergence of an educated labor force in countries such as Japan and the four Asian tigers.³⁸ Following the transition to labor-intensive markets, the region moved on to high-skilled and capital intensive industries, related to technology and machinery, which still persist today. Thanks to this economic growth, the region was able to lift billions of people out of poverty through the creation of new jobs and policies that “contributed to low and stable inflation, [and] low levels of public debt.”³⁹ It also

³⁷ADB Institute and Asian Development Bank, “Infrastructure and Regional Cooperation,” in *Economics of Infrastructure: Asian Development Bank and Asian Development Bank Institute*, edited by Naoyuki Yoshino, Matthias Helble, and Umid Abidhadjaev, 97-122. Singapore: Springer, 2019.
https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-13-3131-2_6.

³⁸Nina Alexeeva , “Trade in Asia ,” Encyclopædia Britannica, August 27, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Asia/Trade>.

³⁹ Edwin M. Truman, “A Strategy for IMF Reform,” *Finance & Development* 43, no. 2 (2006): <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2006/06/burton.htm>.

increased the region's GDP per capita by more than "4,300 percent from 1960 to 2008."⁴⁰ Though the region experienced a financial crisis in the 90s, it quickly recovered and continues to boast a growing economy.

Natural Resources, Conservation, and Human Rights

The Asia Pacific region is home to an innumerable amount of natural resources, growing to be one of the largest providers in the world.⁴¹ According to the United Nations Environmental Programme, it holds "20% of the world's biodiversity, 14% of the world's tropical forests, and 34% of the world's coral reefs."⁴² Given its vast supply of resources, it is no surprise that all nations approach the region for its inventory, especially countries in the region who hope to manage and gain



from it all. In the past few years, powerhouse countries like China, Japan, and South Korea have invested

⁴⁰ Andrew Karolyi, "The Asian Century Has Just Arrived," *Cornell SC Johnson College of Business*, last modified September 4, 2020, <https://business.cornell.edu/hub/2020/09/04/asian-century-just-arrived/.st-arrived/>

⁴¹ CSIRO, "Sustainable Development Investment Pathways for Asia and the Pacific," *Strategic Research Unit Asia Pacific*, accessed September 3, 2024, <https://research.csiro.au/sruap/>.

⁴² United Nations Environment Programme, "Integrating the Value of Nature into Our Economies," <https://www.unep.org/regions/asia-and-pacific/regional-initiatives/integrating-value-nature-our-economies>.

millions of dollars into their naval power in an attempt to assert their presence in the area and control the Pacific.⁴³ In spite of these growing tensions, the ongoing battle for control over the region, and its vast amount of resources, China's access to resources provides an incredible advantage, "taking just over half the total tonnes of the minerals, timber and fish exported."⁴⁴

For centuries, countries like China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei have had disputes over the South China Sea. It is one of the most popular fishing grounds in the world, with more than "half of the world's fishing vessels" operating in the area.⁴⁵ The fishing industry is not only grand in the South China Sea, but throughout the region. In 2021, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations conducted a global count in which they found that 38.98 million people worked at fisheries, of those 79% or 30.77 million were from Asia.⁴⁶ In the Asia Pacific, fishing is a traditional practice taken up by local, small-scale fishermen. Approximately 90% of all fisheries in the region are run by locals, most of whom are indigenous people.⁴⁷ Unfortunately due to predatory markets, indigenous fishermen are often subjugated to forced labor, trafficked, and excluded from higher participation in the fishing industry.⁴⁸ This

⁴³ Al Jazeera, "The Battle for the Pacific: The Countries Competing for Control," *Al Jazeera*, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/4/19/the-battle-for-the-pacific-the-countries-competing-for-control>

⁴⁴ The Guardian, "Pacific Plunder: This Is Who Profits from the Mass Extraction of the Region's Natural Resources," *The Guardian*, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2021/may/31/pacific-plunder-this-is-who-profits-from-the-mass-extraction-of-the-regions-natural-resources-interactive>.

⁴⁵ BBC News, "The Pacific Islands: A World of Their Own," *BBC News*, 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-13748349>.

⁴⁶ Our World in Data, "Fish and Overfishing," *Our World in Data*, 2021, <https://ourworldindata.org/fish-and-overfishing>.

⁴⁷ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "South and Southeast Asia: More than 10 Million People," *FAO*, 2001, <https://www.fao.org/4/x6947e/x6947e04.htm#:~:text=South%20and%20Southeast%20Asia&text=More%20than%2010%20million%20people,mainly%20with%20small%20traditional%20craft>.

⁴⁸ Responsible Business and Human Rights Forum, "Small-Scale Fisheries," *RBHR Forum*, 2023, <https://www.rbhrforum.com/small-scale-fisheries>.

results in numerous violations of their human rights and perpetrates a constant cycle of poverty and exploitation.

Home to about “70% of the world’s indigenous population,” the population of the Asia Pacific are also the most at-risk from industrial practices such as deep-sea mining and deforestation.⁴⁹ The Pacific Ocean is rich in mineral deposits and an attractive place for multinational corporations and governments. Unfortunately, the practice of deep-sea mining often releases wastewater and harmful toxins into the ocean, and results in the disruption and destruction of marine ecosystems.⁵⁰ These harmful effects destroy



conservation efforts, often led by indigenous people, and threaten their livelihoods by interfering with their right to a healthy environment and their source of food and income.

The degradation of the region’s forests through logging, mining, hydropower and other developments, has also undermined conservation efforts and led to numerous human right violations against (mostly) indigenous land stewards. As stated previously, much of Asia had to rebuild its economy following

⁴⁹ Conservation International, "Asia-Pacific," *Conservation International*, 2023, <https://www.conservation.org/places/asia-pacific>.

⁵⁰ <https://www.rbhrforum.com/small-scale-fisheries>

the end of the second world war. During the 1980s and 1990s, Southeast Asia bounced back by dominating “much of the export trade in tropical hardwood logs and plywood products.”⁵¹ Riding on their success, the region neglected conservation and began seeing higher-than-normal rates of deforestation in the 90s. Since then, the region has lost roughly 1.2 percent of its forest annually.⁵² To combat this rapid rate of deforestation, which is the highest in the world, “several countries of the Asia-Pacific region have imposed total or partial logging bans in natural forests as a response to natural disasters that are widely believed to have been caused by deforestation or degradation of forests.”⁵³ Despite these bans, the harmful logging industry persists. In the last few decades, Illegal practices, such as unauthorized encroachment onto protected forests, have been embraced by large corporations and largely ignored by governments due to the fact it brings 11 billion USD to the region annually.⁵⁴

The right to life, health, food, adequate water and sanitation, a healthy environment, housing, livelihoods and culture, is dependent on the land especially for those who have spiritual, cultural, and historical ties to the land. In the Asia-Pacific, indigenous people have long advocated for environmental and human rights, however in recent years corporate and governmental repression towards this vulnerable population has increased due to their growing critique of harmful development in the region.⁵⁵ As APEC strives to improve and further grow its economy, it must uphold international agreements pertaining to

⁵¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Aquaculture Development," *FAO*, 2005, <https://www.fao.org/4/i0627e/I0627E11.htm>.

⁵² Ecological Society of America, "Southeast Asia: A Region of Rapid Change," *Ecological Applications*, 2016, [https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ecs2.1624#:~:text=Southeast%20Asia%20\(S%20E%20Asia\)%20is,in%20a%20variety%20of%20ecosystems](https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ecs2.1624#:~:text=Southeast%20Asia%20(S%20E%20Asia)%20is,in%20a%20variety%20of%20ecosystems).

⁵³ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Asia: Forests and Forestry," *FAO*, 1999, <https://www.fao.org/4/X6967E/x6967e04.htm#:~:text=Several%20countries%20of%20the%20Asia,deforestation%20or%20degradation%20of%20fores>

⁵⁴ Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, "Tainted Timber: The Illegal Timber Trade in Southeast Asia," *Global Initiative*, 2020, https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/tainted_timber/#:~:text=The%20illegal%20timber%20trade%20in,regional%20trade%20in%20wood%20products.

⁵⁵ FairPlanet, "Nowhere to Run: The Cross-Border Persecution of Asia's Human Rights Defenders," *FairPlanet*, 2022, <https://www.fairplanet.org/story/nowhere-to-run-the-cross-border-persecution-of-asias-human-rights-defenders/#:~:text=It%20appears%20that%20across%20Southeast,have%20been%20on%20the%20rise>.

human rights and conservation. This includes reflecting on its current treatment towards those who advocate for conservation and human rights. Through close consideration of its historical and economic use of the land, the region may be able to achieve its aim of promoting economic development that is accessible and considerate to all.

Past Actions

Although the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is an organization focusing on promoting free trade and creating greater prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region, it has tried to address some of the issues of interest. Furthermore, some member countries have also tried to implement their own domestic solutions.

Protecting Labor Rights

The Human Resources Development Working Group (HRDWG) was established in 1990 as the main tool for APEC to develop human resources and focus on issues ranging from education, capacity building to labor and social protection.⁵⁶ The working group conducts their own programs to push forward its mission and utilize networks to focus on more specific and long-lasting issues. The three networks working under HRDWG are the Capacity Building Network (CBN), which focuses on skills development and training, the Education Network (EDNET), which focuses on building strong learning systems and quality equitable education, and the Labor and Social Protection Network (LSPN), which focuses on fostering strong and flexible labor markets and strengthening social protection, including social safety nets.

One of the most recent commitments made by APEC through HRDWG in promoting workers rights within its members is the Arequipa Goals published in May 2024⁵⁷ and the Detroit Non-Binding Principles

⁵⁶Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), "Human Resources Development Working Group," *APEC*, 2023, <https://www.apec.org/groups/som-steering-committee-on-economic-and-technical-cooperation/working-groups/human-resources-development>.

⁵⁷Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), "HRDWG's Equipagoals: Endorsed," *APEC*, 2024, https://www.apec.org/docs/default-source/groups/hrd/2024/hrdwgarequipagoals_endorsed.pdf?sfvrsn=bdf67257_2.

and Recommendations agreed in May 2023.⁵⁸ The two documents lay out steps that members should take to empower people with disabilities in the workforce and indicate that member states should consider the interest and welfare of the workforce in formulating domestic labor-market policies while respecting the fundamental principle of occupational safety and health in the workplace. Although these guiding documents offer a general framework for members, they have not yet established any regional recommendation or incentive for all members to guarantee workers a better working condition and a living wage.

Aside from multilateral decisions, APEC members have implemented a diverse spectrum of domestic policies to protect labor rights within their respective countries. The United States has a comprehensive legal network to protect workers, enforced by the Department of Labor and encompasses 180 federal laws. This includes a federal minimum wage and overtime pay, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)'s regulations and safety and health standards, pension and welfare benefit plans, as well as the Landrum-Griffin Act that protects union funds and promotes union democracy for its members.⁵⁹ Amid some raised concerns on working conditions and union rights,⁶⁰ Russia's labor laws are mainly regulated by the Labor Code of 2001 that includes 40 hours/week working hours, 14 public holidays and rest periods, wages and overtime, 28 days annual leave, and protected maternal and parental leaves.⁶¹ The laws in Malaysia are contained in the Employment Act of 1955, which covers 45 hours working week, overtime pay, up to 16 days of annual leave, maternity leave, retirement savings, and termination notice of

⁵⁸Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), "HRDWG Annual Report," *APEC*, 2023, https://mddb.apec.org/Documents/2023/HRDWG/HRDWG/23_hrdwg_008.pdf.

⁵⁹United States Department of Labor, "Major Laws & Regulations Enforced by the Department of Labor," *DOL*, 2024, <https://www.dol.gov/general/aboutdol/majorlaws>.

⁶⁰OpenDemocracy, "Russia: Workers, Labour Protests, and Strikes," *OpenDemocracy*, 2023, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/russia-worker-labour-protests-strikes-employ>

⁶¹Replicon, "Russia Employment Law," *Replicon*, 2024, <https://www.replicon.com/regulation/russia/>.

at least four weeks.⁶² Despite these protections, some concerns have also been raised regarding worker conditions in Malaysia, especially forced employment of household workers.⁶³

Addressing Wealth and Income Inequality

The multinational organization has also made several efforts to address wealth and gendered inequality within its members. APEC recognizes that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are the main drivers of the economy in the region, accounting for over 97 percent of all businesses, employing over half of the workforce, and contributing between 40 percent to 60 percent to most economies.⁶⁴ Given this significance, APEC established the SME Working Group (SMEWG) in 1995. In September 2020, the working group adopted a strategic plan for 2021-2024 that aims to promote and expand innovation in SMEs, increase SMEs' access to global markets, cultivate more inclusive business skills using technology, and improve access to financial support for SMEs.⁶⁵ These goals would help SMEs in member countries to gain capital and expand, allowing them to grow and spreading out economic growth to the grassroots. This would in turn help income and wealth to be more distributed and lower inequality.

Another means of promoting a more inclusive economy would be to address the unequal gender pay in APEC's member states. This issue is spearheaded by the Policy Partnership on Women and the Economy (PPWE) working group, established in 2011,⁶⁶ and guided by the The La Serena Roadmap for

⁶² Acclime, "Malaysia Employment Law," *Acclime Malaysia*, 2024, <https://malaysia.acclime.com/guides/employment-law/>.

⁶³ Reuters, "Nearly a Third of Domestic Workers in Malaysia Face Forced Labour Conditions: UN Agency," *Reuters*, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/nearly-third-domestic-workers-malaysia-forced-labour-conditions-un-agency-2023-06-16/>.

⁶⁴ Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), "Small and Medium Enterprises Working Group," *APEC*, 2023, <https://www.apec.org/groups/som-steering-committee-on-economic-and-technical-cooperation/working-groups/small-and-medium-enterprises>.

⁶⁵ Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), "APEC SMEWG Annual Report," *APEC*, 2020, https://www.apec.org/docs/default-source/Groups/SMEWG/20_smewg50_030_r.pdf?la=en&hash=C68CF6917E54734C055F9CA8891173558669AC36.

⁶⁶ Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), "Policy Partnership on Women and the Economy," *APEC*, 2023, <https://www.apec.org/groups/som-steering-committee-on-economic-and-technical-cooperation/working-groups/policy-partnership-on-women-and-the-economy>.

Women and Inclusive Growth.⁶⁷ APEC has also established the Women and the Economy sub-fund to institutionalize and support APEC's objectives of increasing women's economic participation in the region. Through these mechanisms, APEC is working to incorporate women's interests in its recommendations and decisions while actively investing in gender equality and inclusion in working environments.

Preserving the Environment

As reckless economic growth goes head to head with environmental protections, APEC is aware of growing concerns and has been implementing measures and initiatives to promote a more sustainable economic trade in the region. In the Putrajaya Vision 2040, APEC committed to promote economic policies that account for environmental challenges for a sustainable planet.⁶⁸ Furthermore, leaders of APEC member states released a joint Golden Gate Declaration in 2023 that promised implementing sustainable resource management, combating illegal fishing, promoting resilient agri-food systems, and adhering to the Bangkok Goals on the Bio-Circular-Green Economy, aiming for sustainable and inclusive economic policies.⁶⁹

To handle matters of deforestation and agriculture, APEC established the Expert Group on Illegal Logging and Associated Trade (EGILAT)⁷⁰ and the Agricultural Technical Cooperation Working Group (ATCWG).⁷¹ The working groups have attempted to set policies that promote sustainable forest management and rehabilitation alongside reducing the activity for illegal logging, as well as advocating for waste reduction, development of next-generation sustainable biofuels, and adjust and mitigate the impact

⁶⁷ Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), "Annex A: Annual Ministerial Meeting 2019," *APEC*, 2019, https://www.apec.org/Meeting-Papers/Annual-Ministerial-Meetings/2019/2019_AMM/Annex-A.

⁶⁸ Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), "Annex A: Leaders' Declarations 2020," *APEC*, 2020, https://www.apec.org/meeting-papers/leaders-declarations/2020/2020_aelm/annex-a.

⁶⁹ Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), "Leaders' Declarations 2023," *APEC*, 2023, <https://www.apec.org/meeting-papers/leaders-declarations/2023/2023-leaders-declaration>

⁷⁰ Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), "Illegal Logging and Associated Trade Working Group," *APEC*, 2023, <https://www.apec.org/groups/som-steering-committee-on-economic-and-technical-cooperation/working-groups/illegal-logging-and-associated-trade>.

⁷¹ Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), "Agricultural Technical Cooperation Working Group," *APEC*, 2023, <https://www.apec.org/groups/som-steering-committee-on-economic-and-technical-cooperation/working-groups/agricultural-technical-cooperation>.

of climate change. Furthermore, APEC initiated the Forest Cover Goal, a program to increase forest cover in the region by 20 million hectares, which was completed in 2021.⁷²

In other areas, APEC has also committed to promoting policies that help more sustainable industries. In 2011, APEC formed the Oceans and Fisheries Working Group (OFWG) that is responsible for facilitating free and open trade in the region while promoting the sustainable use of fisheries and marine resources through combating illegal fishing, regulating marine waste, and efficient management of fisheries chain supply.⁷³ While there is no specific working group for fossil fuels and mining activities, APEC has shown support to policies that advocate for sustainable mining⁷⁴ as well as transition to green sources of energy.⁷⁵ Furthermore, APEC also established the APEC Climate Center (APCC) that provides data modeling and analysis on the effects of climate change to its members.⁷⁶

Protecting Indigenous Rights

The last problem of interest is the protection of indigenous peoples and rights in the region. APEC's past approach to these issues is aimed towards inclusion of marginalized groups. This is reflected through the APEC Growing Indigenous Businesses Through Trade project, where APEC supports a select number of SMEs run by indigenous entrepreneurs while providing business training.⁷⁷ Another example is through policy discussions surrounding the role of indigenous people in the region's economy, that results in policy

⁷²Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), "Achieving the APEC 2020 Forest Cover Goal," *APEC*, 2021, <https://www.apec.org/publications/2021/10/achieving-the-apec-2020-forest-cover-goal#:~:text=The%20Sydney%20Asia%2DPacific%20Economic,hectares%20of%20all%20types%20of>.

⁷³Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), "Ocean and Fisheries Working Group," *APEC*, 2023, <https://www.apec.org/groups/som-steering-committee-on-economic-and-technical-cooperation/working-groups/ocean-and-fisheries>.

⁷⁴Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), "Mining Working Group," *APEC*, 2023, <https://www.apec.org/groups/som-steering-committee-on-economic-and-technical-cooperation/mining>.

⁷⁵Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), "Energy Working Group Mission Statement," *APEC*, 2022, <https://www.egnret.ewg.apec.org/TOR-mission.html>.

⁷⁶Asia-Pacific Carbon Cooperation Council (APCC), "APCC Overview," *APCC*, 2023, <https://www.apcc21.org/?lang=en>.

⁷⁷Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), "APEC SMEWG Overview," *APEC*, 2022, https://mddb.apec.org/Documents/2022/SMEWG/SMEWG53/22_smewg53_013.pdf.

recommendations for member countries.⁷⁸ Finally, APEC has also pushed for an inclusive tourism industry, which extends to considering indigenous people's interests in promoting and developing the tourism industry.⁷⁹

Possible Solutions

Given the actions that the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) has taken as an organization and policies that its members have implemented to address the problem of economic growth, human rights, and conservation, there are three potential solutions that the committee can take or adopt. However, it is worth noting that APEC is restrained by its mission to promote free trade and does not have binding enforcing abilities upon its members.

Incentives For Quality and Equal Working Conditions

As mentioned in the previous section, APEC has launched initiatives and committed to create a more inclusive working environment and consider the welfare of workers when member states formulate policies. Therefore, the committee could either adopt those policies and create concrete steps and programs, or change the direction that APEC currently aims to, especially by creating a regional standard for labor rights.

If the committee decides to maintain APEC's direction to promote free trade while considering human rights, the committee can formulate programs that APEC would implement. This includes creating educational programs and training for populations of the member states to increase capacity building, digital transformation, and income. Furthermore, APEC could implement programs that support workers through economic or trade

⁷⁸Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), "Unlocking Indigenous Peoples' Economic Potential," *APEC*, 2022, https://www.apec.org/docs/default-source/publications/2022/1/unlocking-indigenous-peoples-economic-potential-in-the-asia--pacific-region-for-a-more-inclusive-recovery/222_ec_policy-dialogue-on-unlocking-indigenous-peoples'-economic-potential.pdf?sfvrsn=e201893f_4.

⁷⁹Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), "Driving Tourism Forward: Balancing Sustainability and Economic Growth," *APEC*, 2024, <https://www.apec.org/press/blogs/2024/driving-tourism-forward--balancing-sustainability-and-economic-growth>.

incentives for businesses providing healthcare access and retirement benefits for their employees. It could also conduct fieldwork with member states, non-governmental, or other international organizations to identify and regulate industries or businesses that do not meet human rights or labor standards.

The committee can also decide to create regional standards and include incentives for member countries to implement them. Firstly, these regional standards should be something that most members would agree to, and encompass issues such as minimum wage, overtime work, weekly working hours, paternal or maternal leaves, paid annual leaves, working place conditions and safety for different industries, right to unionize, retirement savings, and termination policies. Second, since APEC currently does not have a specific working group on labor rights, the committee could adopt a new body under APEC that has the goal and ability to draft and enforce those standards. Finally, the new regional standards must be optional while being highly-encouraged using trade sanctions or incentives. The scale and extent of such policies would depend on the committee and individual members, but may include additional customs fees for products that come from reportedly abusive working places and reduction of custom fees for those who meet the standards.

Incentives For Environmental Protection

Similar to its human rights operations, the committee could either continue APEC's existing stand with regards to the environment and formulate new programs, or take more concrete actions through policies and regulations. Given that APEC leaders have an outstanding commitment to sustainable economic growth, the committee could formulate targets with specific numbers, create task forces that focus on certain environmental issues, provide economic support to member states or programs that aim to promote preservation and sustainability.

On the other hand, the committee could adopt a more regulatory and advocacy approach to its members. This would include creating standards or targets that members must achieve, assembling a new overseeing body

or collaborating with other international organizations, and providing economic or trade incentives for members to adopt these measures.

Incentives For Indigenous Rights

As previously mentioned, APEC currently does not have a robust mechanism in protecting and promoting indigenous rights within its members. The committee could, therefore, focus on building a new mechanism to address this gap in the organization. This could be done by creating a specialized task force or working group that centers on researching the impacts and roles of indigenous groups in the region while advocating for policies and programs that not only include indigenous perspectives but support and preserve their livelihoods and rights amid economic activities. The organization could also work with local non-governmental or international organizations to conduct studies or fieldworks to oversee and report how member countries engage with indigenous communities. The challenge to this measure is to make sure member states could agree to a common ground that would be beneficial and not pose a threat to their domestic interests.

Bloc Positions

Vernacularization of Human Rights and Conservation Differs

Human rights and conservation are both practices that are riddled with Western dialogue, beliefs, and legal practices, however through globalization those practices have spread to other parts of the world such as Asia and the Pacific. Though both are rooted in Western tradition, the practice of vernacularization has supported the implementation and spread of human rights and conservation to other countries such as those that are members of APEC. Vernacularization is characterized by the people in the middle, particularly those who translate the discourses and practices from the arena of international law and legal institutions to local spaces.⁸⁰ The practice does not resort to a one size fits all method, but instead allows for local cultural norms and practices to be integrated with the imported institution. Given the vast cultural, social, and political diversity of APEC's member states, each country's interpretation and implementation of human rights and conservation greatly differs.

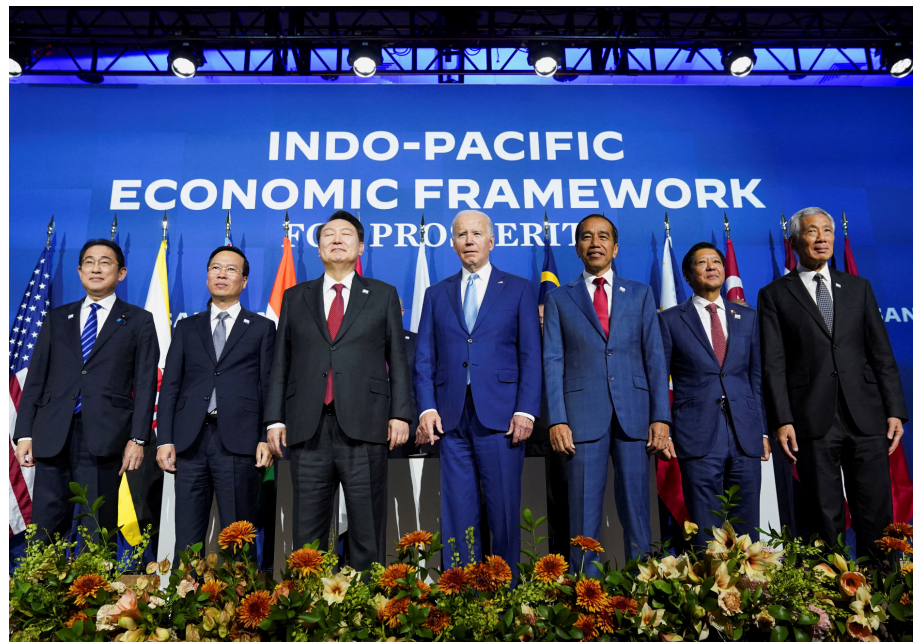
States in the committee may be divided into three blocs pertaining to their history, implementation, and broader world views and relations. Member economies from the West—Australia, Canada, Chile, Mexico, Peru, the United States of America—come from the general region which conceptualized international human rights and conservation laws. Given their proximity, economic ties, constant alignment on global issues, and similar track record and methods of implementation when it comes to human rights and conservation, these countries

⁸⁰Sally Engle Merry, *Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle*, (Berkeley: University of California, 2006), <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/MerryAATransnationalHumanRights2006.pdf>.

may choose to align. Countries in constant political conflict with the United States, such as China and The Russian Federation, may choose to align as they are both influential powerhouses

that often opt for policies that are independent of that of the United States.

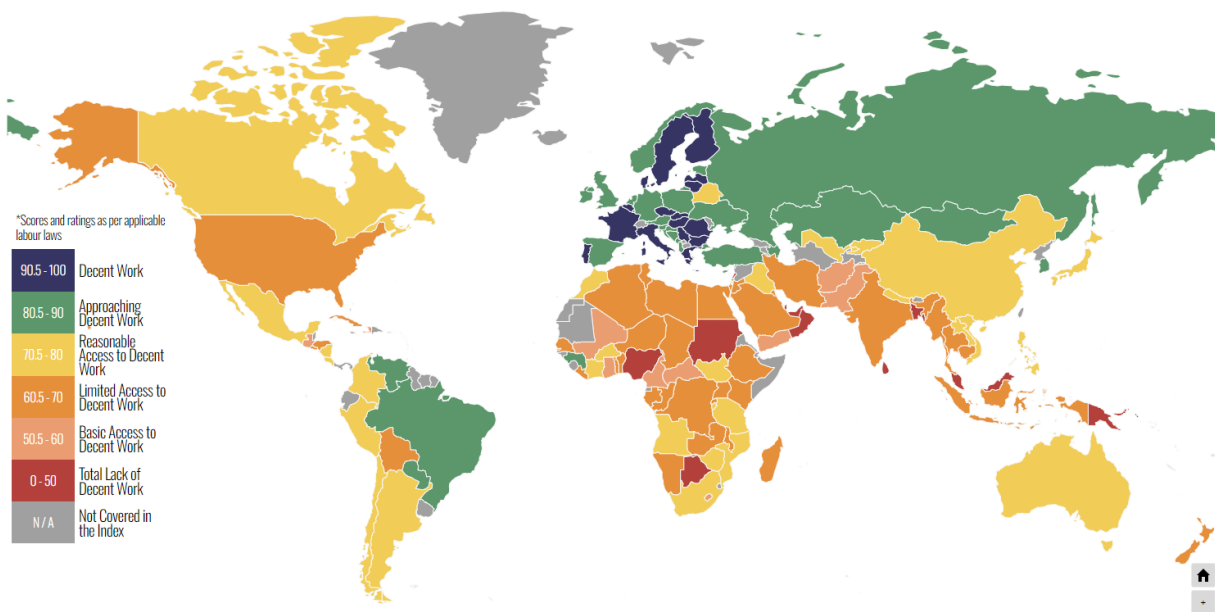
Thus, their methodology pertaining to human rights, conservation, and the economy



may differ and constitute different parties. Countries such as the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Japan, Thailand, Brunei, Singapore, Indonesia, Viet Nam and India (a continuous guest member) have established partnerships and positive relations with China, the Russian Federation, and the United States. Given how many of these nations have positive relations with all three of the intergovernmental forum's strongest members, they must learn to balance their international ties and while preserving their individual development and need for independent economic success. Countries who are a part of this bloc primarily consist of Southeast Asia and other small nations. Given their position they may choose to form their own bloc, which would prioritize the economic interests of developing Asia-Pacific countries, or they may choose to join the other blocs.

Labor Rights

States in the committee may be divided into two main blocs based on their labor rights laws, which can favor either workers or corporations. The Labor Rights Index provides a measure of member states regarding their laws on minimum wage, working hours, employment security, safe working conditions, social security, fair treatment, child and forced labor, and freedom of trade unions.⁸¹ A heatmap of the index from 2022 is shown below.



States scoring lower in the index indicate lower quality of working conditions and workers' protections, while those with a higher score indicate better conditions and guarantees from the government to the workers. In the committees, states in the lower end of the spectrum may opt for free-market policies that often disregard worker welfare. This will contradict with states on the higher end of the spectrum that could advocate for regulations or incentives for

⁸¹Labour Rights Index, *Labour Rights Index 2022 Update* (March 2023), <https://labourrightsindex.org/documents/labourrightsindex-2022-update-march2023.pdf>.

better worker rights and working conditions. Considering the members of the committee and the index, countries that are likely to fall in the first bloc include Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the United States of America, while those on the other end may include Chile, China, Mexico, and Russia.

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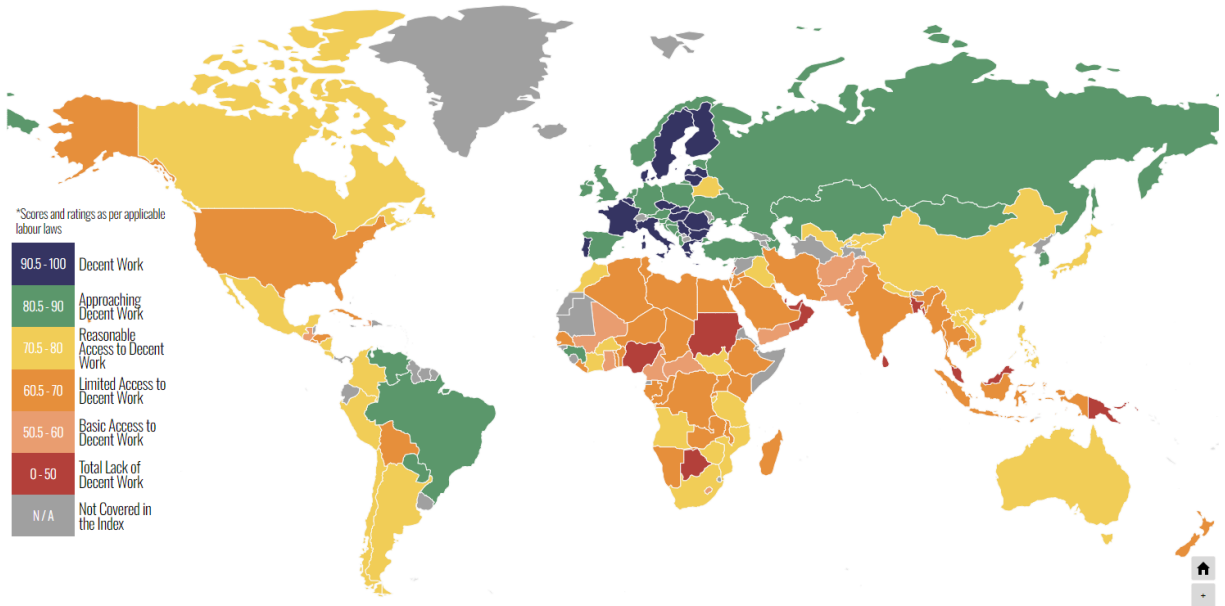
⁸²Sally Engle Merry, *Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle*, (Berkeley: University of California, 2006), <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/MerryAATransnationalHumanRights2006.pdf>.

United States, such as China and The Russian Federation, may choose to align as they are both influential powerhouses that often opt for policies that are independent of that of the United States. Thus, their methodology pertaining to human rights, conservation, and the economy may differ and constitute different parties. Countries such as the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Japan, Thailand, Brunei, Singapore, Indonesia, Viet Nam and India (a continuous guest member) have established partnerships and positive relations with China, the Russian Federation, and the United States. Given how many of these nations have positive relations with all three of the intergovernmental forum's strongest members, they must learn to balance their international ties and while preserving their individual development and need for independent economic success. Countries who are a part of this bloc primarily consist of Southeast Asia and other small nations. Given their position they may choose to form their own bloc, which would prioritize the economic interests of developing Asia-Pacific countries, or they may choose to join the other blocs.

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⁸³Labour Rights Index, *Labour Rights Index 2022 Update* (March 2023), <https://labourrightsindex.org/documents/labourrightsindex-2022-update-march2023.pdf>.



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Glossary

Human Rights: Universal rights that are applicable to all humans, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. International human rights law upholds human rights by holding governments accountable and outlining their obligations in promoting and protecting human rights.

Conservation: Conservation is a movement and study aimed at preserving Earth's wildlife and promoting its biodiversity.

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs): Enterprises that maintain revenues, assets, and/or a number of employees below a certain threshold. SMEs are found across a variety of industries but operate distinctly to multinational corporations. SME's largely contribute to the employment of people in developing countries and have the vantage point of being more flexible and having access to government incentives.

Illegal Logging: The harvest, transportation, purchase, or sale of timber through illegal means. This industry is one of the predominant causes behind deforestation.

Non-governmental organization (NGO): An organization that is created and operated independently from the government. Numerous NGOs operate as non-profit institutions and focus on humanitarian and social missions. Though NGOs are created independently from the government, the two rely and support each other. NGOs support the government through their flexibility and ability to implement policies, such as those promoting local economic growth, while governments aid NGOs through contracts and grant opportunities.

Exploitative Markets: Market economies that injure or exploit others for their gain or profit. Markets may not be illicit on the surface level, however use of illegal labor and buying out protected lands, count as exploitative practices.

Free-trade: A governmental trade policy that does not impede imports and exports. Though “free” implies that the country does not impose restrictions, countries typically do not relinquish complete control over their trade.

Working Group: A group of experts or representatives from member economies that come together to discuss and find solutions to a range of issues.

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TOPIC B: TRANSITIONING FROM FOSSIL FUELS TO GREEN ENERGY

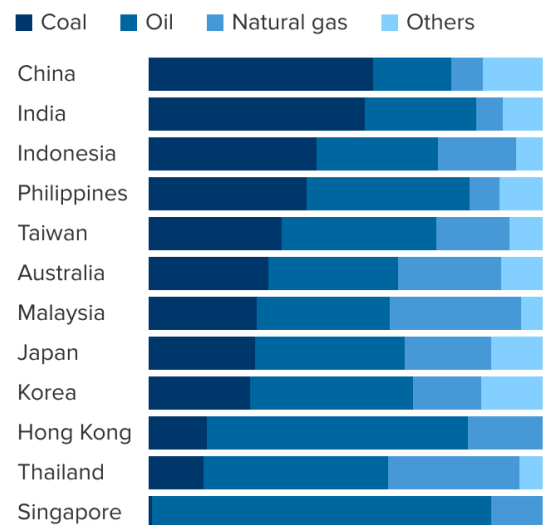
Statement of the Problem

Despite the looming threat of climate change, fossil fuels persist across the globe as a primary source that many nations rely on for energy consumption, notably in the Asia-Pacific region. The Asia-Pacific region accounts for over 50% of global energy consumption, with 85% coming from fossil fuels.⁸⁵ The countries in this region serve as some of the biggest fossil fuel consumers in the world, with fossil fuels accounting for 82% of energy consumption in China and 88% in India.⁸⁶

⁸⁷ The Asia-Pacific region has 43% of the world's coal reserves, and 27 countries in the region account for 76% of global coal generation capacity⁸⁸. The region has 2.6% of the world's oil

Energy consumption in major Asia-Pacific economies

Primary fuel type (% of total) in 2020



Note: Others refer to nuclear energy, hydro electricity and renewables

Source: BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2021, Morgan Stanley Research



⁸⁴ CNBC. "COP26 Charts Show Asia-Pacific's Heavy Reliance on Coal for Energy." Last modified November 8, 2021. <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/11/08/cop26-charts-show-asia-pacifics-heavy-reliance-on-coal-for-energy.html>.

⁸⁵ International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA). "Asia and the Pacific." Accessed August 24, 2024. <https://www.irena.org/How-we-work/Asia-and-Pacific>.

⁸⁶ Reuters. "China, India Struggle to Curb Fossil Fuels." Last modified October 19, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/china-india-struggle-curb-fossil-fuels-kemp-2023-10-19/>.

⁸⁷ Expert Market Research. Asia Pacific Renewable Energy Market. Accessed August 24, 2024. <https://www.expertmarketresearch.com/reports/asia-pacific-renewable-energy-market>.

⁸⁸ Climate Analytics. Coal Phase-Out and Energy Transition Pathways for Asia and the Pacific. <https://climateanalytics.org/publications/coal-phase-out-and-energy-transition-pathways-for-asia-and-the-pacific>.

reserves, and 9% of the world's gas reserves, which is the third-largest in the world.⁸⁹

However, the region's heavy reliance on fossil fuels massively contributes to global carbon dioxide emissions, posing disastrous⁹⁰ threats to the climate and existential risks for the planet. Because of these effects that are largely perpetuated through the heavy usage of fossil fuels, it is imperative that the nations in these regions address these issues and find



ways to effectively transition to more sustainable energy sources, such as renewable energy.

Negative Effects of Fossil Fuel Use and Climate Change

Pacific Island states and Asian coastal nations are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, such as extreme weather phenomena and rising sea levels. Due to climate change from increased fossil fuel emissions, there has been an increase in the frequency and severity of natural disasters like cyclones. Countries in the Asia-Pacific region already have experienced around six natural disasters a year over the past three decades, which is twice as many as faced by Latin America and three times as many as sub-Saharan Africa. In 2022, these extreme weather events led to over 7,500 deaths, with economic damage estimated at the equivalent of \$57 billion. These hazards also led to 32.6 million internal displacements worldwide in that year alone, 70% of which occurred in⁹¹ the Asia-Pacific region specifically. The countries most susceptible to these disasters tend to be those with higher poverty rates, which threatens the

⁸⁹ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). Coal Phase-Out and Energy Transition Pathways. February 25, 2021.

<https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/knowledge-products/Coal-Phase-Out-and-Energy-Transition-Pathways-25-Feb-2021.pdf>.

⁹⁰ DU Clarion. "What Does It Mean to Divest from Fossil Fuels?" Last modified January 20, 2022.

<https://duclarion.com/2022/01/what-does-it-mean-to-divest-from-fossil-fuels/>.

⁹¹ Flickr. "Photo by Direct Relief". <https://www.flickr.com/photos/directrelief/4150907272>.

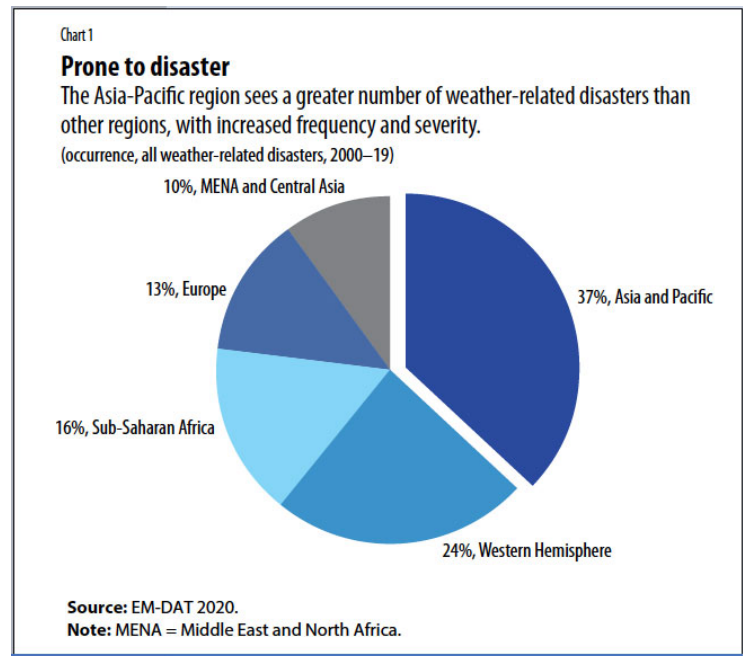
livelihoods, homes, and job prospects of the most vulnerable members of society who are not able to easily recover from the damages.



Another significant effect of climate change is rising sea levels. The Asia-Pacific region holds 70 percent of the global population that is susceptible to sea level rise, and this crisis also has both catastrophic effects on individual homes and livelihoods as well as the region's economy. The Asia-Pacific economy is largely

dependent on its⁹² coastlines due to the presence of large coastal cities like Tokyo and Mumbai, and the prevalence of industries like tourism, fishing, and trade in the coastal areas. Natural hazards like cyclones and rising sea levels affect the populations of these cities and stability of these industries, having direct links to the economic strength of the societies that compose this region.

Moreover, changing temperatures and weather patterns due to climate change increase the risk of infectious diseases, including pandemics. Fossil fuel consumption and climate change additionally largely contribute to a loss of biodiversity with destruction of habitats due to pollution from power plants, climate-provoked natural hazards, and phenomena like⁹³ rising



⁹² International Monetary Fund (IMF). "Global Financial Stability Report: A Decade after the Global Financial Crisis." IMF eLibrary 58, no. 3 (2023). <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/022/0058/003/article-A017-en.xml>.

⁹³ PxHere. "Photo," accessed August 24, 2024. <https://pxhere.com/en/photo/684114>.

sea⁹⁴ levels. Since 1970, the Asia-Pacific region has already been facing the third-largest biodiversity decline in the world after Latin America and Africa, which only continues to be exacerbated by the current climate crisis. This loss of biodiversity fuels zoonotic diseases, which further negatively impacts the population of this region⁹⁵.

Hindrances To Transition

While a transition away from fossil fuels to renewable energy is essential, this feat is particularly challenging for nations in the Asia-Pacific region, due to concerns regarding financing, regulation, and the amount of land required. Renewable energy projects are incredibly expensive to set up, and Asia's banks have a record of being reluctant to fund these projects due to their perceived risk and low return. In order to meet the decarbonization target, Southeast Asia alone will need to spend at least \$367 billion over the next five years. Especially after the pandemic, regional governments are wary of incurring more debt, making them more hesitant to promote and fund this energy transition.⁹⁶ This has already been witnessed in Indonesia, whose leaders invested only \$3 billion into renewable energy between 2017 and 2021, even though an estimated \$25 billion per year through 2030 is what is actually needed in order to have a real impact in reducing⁹⁷ emissions.

In addition, the common usage of remote areas for renewable energy projects makes it challenging to obtain the environmental and land use permits required to develop these programs. Renewable energy sources also require larger plots of land than non-renewable power plants, which may be difficult to obtain

⁹⁴ Reuters. "Asian Tropical Coastlines Most Vulnerable to Rising Seas: Study." Last modified June 29, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/asian-tropical-coastlines-most-vulnerable-rising-seas-study-2021-06-29/>.

⁹⁵ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). "Asia-Pacific Climate Change Poses Existential Threat: Extreme Weather Worsening Poverty and Risks to Public Health, Says UNDP Report." Last modified August 23, 2022. <https://www.undp.org/asia-pacific/news/asia-pacific-climate-change-poses-existential-threat-extreme-weather-worsening-poverty-and-risks-public-health-says-undp-report>.

⁹⁶ Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). "Clean Energy and Decarbonization in Southeast Asia: An Overview of Obstacles and Opportunities". <https://www.csis.org/analysis/clean-energy-and-decarbonization-southeast-asia-overview-obstacles-and-opportunities>.

⁹⁷ The Caravel. "Climate Crossroads: Beware the Blank Checks of Climate Finance." Last modified October 20, 2021. <https://www.thecaravelgu.com/blog/2021/10/20/climate-crossroads-beware-the-blank-checks-of-climate-finance>.

in densely populated nations or those with smaller land masses that lack available space.⁹⁸ Moreover, many power grids across the Asia-Pacific region are not designed for renewable energy production. This would require a complete shift in necessary equipment, rather than expanding existing infrastructure. In lower-income countries that rely heavily on fossil fuels, many jobs depend on the current energy structure. When shifting toward renewable energy, it is important to ensure that there are adequate opportunities provided for those whose jobs will ultimately be lost.⁹⁹

An overhaul of the current reliance of the Asia-Pacific region's energy system on fossil fuels is not a simple feat. In order to achieve an effective and sustainable transition to renewable sources of energy, the nations of APEC must come together and address the many factors discussed above that pose unique challenges to achieving this solution. Despite the challenges, it is paramount that these crises be addressed by the leaders of these nations to protect the people that reside in this region from the effects of climate change, as well as the overall fate of the planet.

⁹⁸ Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP. "Renewable Energy Disputes in the Asia-Pacific: Emerging Trends and Challenges" <https://www.gibsondunn.com/renewable-energy-disputes-in-the-asia-pacific-emerging-trends-and-challenges>.

⁹⁹ PwC Indonesia. "A Just and Orderly Energy Transition". <https://www.pwc.com/id/en/pwc-presence-at-the-b20-forum/a-just-and-orderly-energy-transition.html>.

History of Problem:

Just this past year, World Bank East Asia and Pacific Vice-President Manuela V. Ferro said, “The East Asia and Pacific region is making a strong contribution to world economic growth, even as it faces a more challenging and uncertain global environment, aging population, and the impacts of climate change.”¹⁰⁰ Ferro added to his praise by encouraging the region to sustain its “growth momentum,” a momentum which has historically been dependent on the energy derived from fossil fuels.

Currently, the Asia- Pacific region consumes roughly half of the world’s energy production.¹⁰¹ Based on statistics from the last ten years, this consumption does not seem to be going down at all, despite numerous concerns over the region’s heavy reliance on harmful fossil fuels.¹⁰² As the region continues to grow economically, so does its demand for energy. As it stands, the region does not intend to give up its use of energy anytime soon, however it is considering other, cleaner, sources of energy that can sustain its growing economy. Through this search the region hopes to preserve its economic success thus far, while

¹⁰⁰World Bank, “East Asia and Pacific to Sustain Growth Amid Global Headwinds,” *Press Release*, March 31, 2024, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2024/03/31/east-asia-and-pacific-to-sustain-growth-amid-global-headwinds#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThe%20East%20Asia%20and%20Pacific,Ferro>.

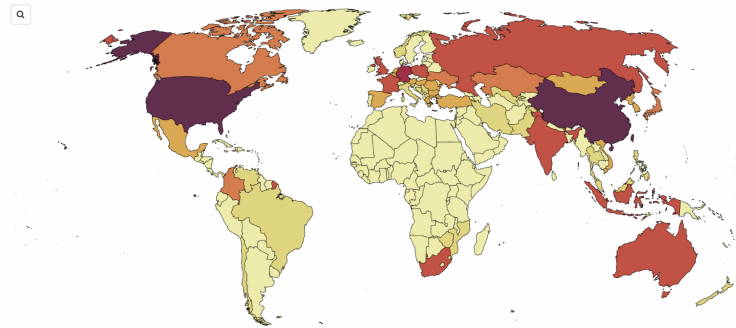
¹⁰¹ Katharina Buchholz, “Asia Will Use Half of the World’s Electricity by 2025,” *World Economic Forum*, February 17, 2023, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/02/electricity-demand-asia-energy/#:~:text=Data%20Journalist%2C%20Statista-,Asia%20will%20use%20half%20of%20the%20world's%20electricity%20by%202025,fired%20electricity%20in%20many%20places>.

¹⁰²“Primary Energy Consumption in the Asia Pacific Region,” *Statista*, accessed September 3, 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/265591/primary-energy-consumption-in-asia-pacific/#:~:text=Primary%20energy%20consumption%20in%20the,comparison%20to%20the%20previous%20year>.

Cumulative coal production by country, 1900-2022

Units are exajoules.

Cumulative production (EJ) 0 500 1000 2132



Source: Our World in Data
Boston University Institute for Global Sustainability | visualizingenergy.org | CC BY 4.0

visualizingEnergy

upholding global commitments towards combating climate change. Despite working on its green transition, the region's long use and dependence on fossil fuels is one that has not been easy to let go.

Coal's History in Asia and the Pacific

Coal is the most used fossil fuel in the Asia-Pacific region. It accounts for more than half of the energy generated and consumed in the region, and has contributed greatly to the growth and development of the region through the last few centuries.¹⁰³ One of the primary reasons Asia is the largest consumer of coal is due to the fact that the region is about 3/5th's of the world's coal reserves.¹⁰⁴ Though natural gas and other mineral resources have risen in use amongst fossil fuels, coal continues to reign as a dependable and traditional source of energy for the region.

Though coal is often associated with Europe's industrial revolution, which occurred during the late 1700s to the mid-1800s, China began using the resource long before. Roughly 3,000 years ago, pre-modern China opened the first coal mine in the world, the Fushan Mine.¹⁰⁵ Coal was originally used for carving crafts and occasionally burned for heat– it was through the opening of the Fushan Mine that China “took a

¹⁰³“Mapped: Asia’s Biggest Sources of Electricity by Country,” *Visual Capitalist*, accessed September 3, 2024, <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/mapped-asias-biggest-sources-of-electricity-by-country/>.

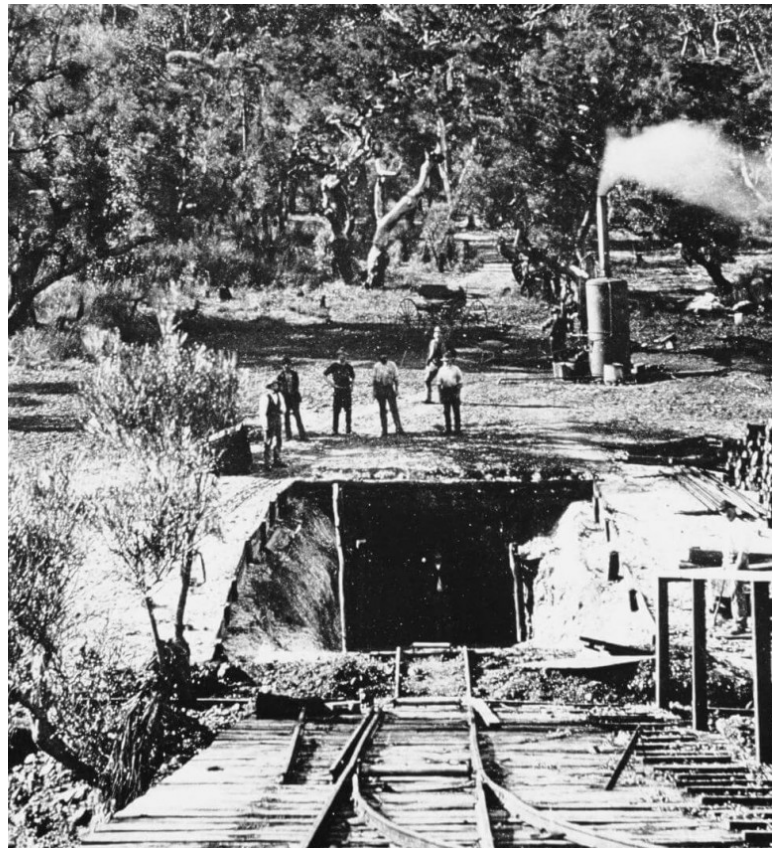
¹⁰⁴ “Asia - Mineral Resources,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, last modified March 31, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Asia/Mineral-resources>.

¹⁰⁵ “Unearthing Ancient Mysteries: Ancient China,” *Alberta’s Energy Heritage*, accessed September 3, 2024, <http://history.alberta.ca/energyheritage/coal/early-coal-history-to-1900/unearthing-ancient-mysteries/ancient-china.aspx#:~:text=By%20around%20the%20third%20century,derived%20charcoal%20in%20blast%20furnaces>.

significant step toward meeting their energy needs.”¹⁰⁶ The use of coal for heat-energy supported ancient China’s advancement and saved the nation from a deforestation crisis it endured in the early centuries, due to the common practice of burning wood-derived charcoal. Around the 1100s, the use of wood for heat-energy practically vanished and coal took over.

Though China has a longstanding history with coal, Australia and Indonesia are two member economies that currently rank on top as

exporters of coal. Australia first discovered its coal reserves in the 1790s; areas such as the young colony of New South Wales quickly made use of its coal reserves and used it as “fuel for heating and cooking, and later steam locomotion.”¹⁰⁷ By the early 1900s, Australia was exporting several million tonnes of coal. This growth followed Australia through and after the Second World War, when countless countries, particularly those in Asia and the Pacific, were introduced to new



machinery and reinventing their economies.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 7.

¹⁰⁷ “Mining History,” *Australian Mining History Association*, accessed September 3, 2024, <https://www.mininghistory.asn.au/mining-history/>.

¹⁰⁸ Lauren Waldhuter, “Changing Climate of Coal Mining in Australia,” *ABC Rural*, December 6, 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2020-12-06/changing-climate-of-coal-mining-australia-environment/12918334>.

Like Australia, Indonesia also has had a long history of being in the coal industry. It opened its first mine in 1849 and experienced success in the coal export industry up until the Second World War, where it experienced a long-period of decline.¹⁰⁹ World War Two disrupted trade throughout the world, but affected Asia-Pacific economies the most during and in the years following after the war. In the case of Indonesia, it took 40 years for the country to recover its standing in the coal industry. Through the opening of new coal mines in the 1980s and the liberalization of Indonesia's investment and mining laws, the nation was able to return and eventually surpass its former glory; for the past two decades, Indonesia has consistently ranked as the top exporter of coal in the world.

History of Climate Change

According to the United Nations, “Fossil fuels – coal, oil and gas – are by far the largest contributor to global climate change, accounting for over 75 percent cent of global greenhouse gas emissions and nearly 90 percent per cent of all carbon dioxide emissions.”¹¹⁰ Today much of the world recognizes climate change as a global concern and has implemented sustainable models to attempt to combat its effects. Despite companies and governments taking the matter more seriously, this was not always the case.

In 1896, Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius published a paper titled “On the Influence of Carbonic Acid in the Air upon the Temperature of the Ground.”¹¹¹ This paper was the first of many to theorize about the negative effects coal burning had on the world and its contribution to the globe’s hotter temperatures. Following Arrhenius’ publication, other journals and newspapers began warning the public of climate change and its possible consequences. Pictured on the left, on October 15, 1902, the Selma Morning Times

¹⁰⁹ David Lucarelli, "China's Coal Industry: Policies and Supply Chains," *ScienceDirect*, 2016, [https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0166516216308229#:~:text=1..2005%20\(Lucarelli%2C%202015\)](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0166516216308229#:~:text=1..2005%20(Lucarelli%2C%202015).).

¹¹⁰ United Nations, “Causes and Effects of Climate Change,” *United Nations Climate Change*, accessed September 3, 2024, [https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/causes-effects-climate-change#:~:text=Fossil%20fuels%20%E2%80%93%20coal%2C%20oil%20and,they%20trap%20the%20sun's%20heat](https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/causes-effects-climate-change#:~:text=Fossil%20fuels%20%E2%80%93%20coal%2C%20oil%20and,they%20trap%20the%20sun's%20heat.).

¹¹¹ Svante Arrhenius, “On the Influence of Carbonic Acid in the Air upon the Temperature of the Ground,” *The London, Edinburgh, and Dublin Philosophical Magazine and Journal of Science*, 1896, https://www.rsc.org/images/Arrhenius1896_tcm18-173546.pdf.

published a chilling warning to the public about the possible “extinction of the human race.”¹¹² Warnings such as those made by the Selma Morning Times continued to grow through the 1900s as the Western conservation movement grew. Though numerous scientific and literary publications, most notably Aldo Leopold’s “A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There,” Paul R. Ehrlich’s “The Population Bomb,” and Rachel Carson’s “Silent Spring,” did not gain notoriety immediately following their publication in the 1940-60s, these publications were crucial to the environmental movement of the 1970s, which greatly pushed for greater awareness of the problem. Despite greater public awareness regarding climate change emerging in the 1970s, various investigations have shown that multi-national fossil fuel companies had known about the issue at least 11 years before it became mainstream.¹¹³ They also verified that the origin of climate change denial is largely traced back to millions of dollars poured into misinformation promoted by fossil fuel giants.

Though climate change denial persists in the twenty-first century, it is nowhere near where it was before. The international community has taken many steps to discuss climate change, the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm was the first conference to discuss the matter of climate change and since then various international committees have congregated to address the issue.¹¹⁴

¹¹²“Article Warns of the Dangers of Burning Coal,” *Zinn Education Project*, accessed September 3, 2024, <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/article-warns-of-burning-coal/>.

¹¹³Shannon Hall, “Exxon Knew About Climate Change Almost 40 Years Ago,” *Scientific American*, October 26, 2015, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/exxon-knew-about-climate-change-almost-40-years-ago/>.

¹¹⁴United Nations, “United Nations Conference on the Human Environment,” *United Nations*, accessed September 3, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment>.

Past Actions

As a forum for economic cooperation, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) has expressed continued support and initiated movements or projects to support the reduction of fossil fuel use, transition to renewable energy, and mitigating the impacts of climate change for its members. To spearhead and organize its efforts for clean energy transition while uplifting the role of energy in the regional economy, the multinational organizations formed the Energy Working Group (EWG) in 1990, which is supported by four expert groups, one task force, and two research centers.¹¹⁵

Use of Fossil Fuel

APEC leaders have stated their commitment to reducing member states' dependency on fossil fuels. In 2021, Economic Leaders of APEC met amid the COVID-19 pandemic recovery and released a statement to emphasize APEC's efforts to support the adoption of renewable energy and environmental-friendly technologies as part of sustainable energy transitions to reduce its members' dependence on fossil fuels while acknowledging the importance of stable energy markets.¹¹⁶ A year later, APEC leaders further highlighted the commitment to rationalize and phase out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption while recognizing the importance of providing those in need with essential energy services.¹¹⁷

In addition to continued support and commitment, APEC has taken steps to provide resources for member states to achieve their goals for reducing fossil fuel use and carbon emissions. In 2022, the Asia Pacific Energy Research Centre (APEREC) released an Energy Demand and Supply Outlook that details current and projected energy consumption and production in the region, including trajectories to achieve

¹¹⁵ Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), "APEC Advances Green and Low-Carbon Hydrogen Transition," *APEC Press Release*, April 10, 2024, <https://www.apec.org/press/news-releases/2024/apec-advances-green-and-low-carbon-hydrogen-transition#:~:text=APEC%20member%20economies%20are%20laying,green%20and%20low%2Dcarbon%20hydrogen>.

¹¹⁶ Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), "2021 Leaders' Declaration," *APEC Meeting Papers*, November 12, 2021, <https://www.apec.org/meeting-papers/leaders-declarations/2021/2021-leaders-declaration>.

¹¹⁷ IBID

net-zero carbon emissions by 2030 and 2050, as well as reducing energy-intensive industries by a half.¹¹⁸ The organization has also conducted programs to achieve the mission, including workshops for policy-makers and government officials and a movement to collect data and research on energy transition.¹¹⁹

To further support the reduction of fossil fuel use in the region, APEC established the Expert Group on Clean Fossil Energy (EGCFE) which has facilitated workshops, symposiums, and joint meetings between leaders on the topic of decarbonization of fossil fuels, clean hydrogen energy, and promoting energy efficiency and energy management systems.¹²⁰ In the future, the working group aims to launch more projects to achieve its goals while considering the supply and demand side and the utilization of clean energy and energy efficiency in realizing energy transition.

Transitioning To Renewable Energy

As APEC tries to reduce its dependency on fossil fuels, it has also committed and taken measures to transition to green energy sources. In 2023, APEC leaders released the Golden Gate Declaration that recognizes the efforts required for members to accelerate their sustainable, just, affordable, and inclusive energy transitions through various pathways to achieve global net-zero greenhouse gas emissions and carbon neutrality targets by 2050 while taking into account different domestic circumstances.¹²¹ To this end, the multilateral organization seeks to create new jobs and investments while ensuring energy, security, resilience, and access in the region. Furthermore, the statement also expressed commitment to triple renewable energy capacity globally based on member states' domestic circumstances by 2030 through a

¹¹⁸ Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), *APEC Energy Demand and Supply Outlook, 8th Edition – Volume I*, September 2022, https://www.apec.org/docs/default-source/publications/2022/9/apec-energy-demand-and-supply-outlook-8th-edition---volume-i/222_ewg_apec-energy-demand-and-supply-outlook_vol-1_o.pdf?sfvrsn=d452b4a3_2.

¹¹⁹ <https://aimp2.apec.org/sites/PDB/Lists/Proposals/DispForm.aspx?ID=672>

¹²⁰ Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), “APEC Energy Ministerial Meeting 2023,” *APEC Energy Working Group*, October 14, 2023, https://aperc.or.jp/file/2024/6/14/1030_Joint_Mtg_EGCFE_Update_report.pdf.

¹²¹ Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), “APEC Energy Ministerial Meeting 2023,” *APEC Energy Working Group*, October 14, 2023, https://aperc.or.jp/file/2024/6/14/1030_Joint_Mtg_EGCFE_Update_report.pdf.

transition towards low and zero-emissions vehicles, sustainable aviation fuels, and low and zero-emission maritime shipping and port decarbonization.¹²²

In addition to the most recent leaders' statement, APEC had formulated the Aotearoa Plan of Action that details its strategy to deliver existing commitments on energy issues, including accelerating progress towards the 2030 target of doubling the share of renewable energy in the region's power production and use, from 2010 levels by 2030, while reducing the aggregate energy intensity by 45%, from 2005 levels, by 2035.¹²³ Furthermore, recent developments have shown that APEC aims to further reduce the cost of low-carbon hydrogen, wind, and solar energy as decreasing costs of renewable energy in the last 15 years has prompted more widespread use,¹²⁴ while reducing methane emissions by leakage detection technology transfer.¹²⁵

To oversee and advise its efforts for a clean energy transition, APEC established three expert groups under the EWG. These include the Energy Data and Analysis (EGEDA), which provides policy-relevant energy information through collecting energy data, and the Energy Efficiency and Conservation (EGEEC), which improves the analytical, technical, operational, and policy capacity for energy efficiency and conservation within member economies, and the New and Renewable Energy Technologies (EGNRET), which facilitates an increase in the use of new and renewable energy technologies in the region.¹²⁶

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), "Strong, Balanced, Secure, Sustainable, and Inclusive Growth," *Aotearoa Plan of Action*, accessed September 3, 2024, <https://aotearoaplanofaction.apec.org/strong-balanced-secure-sustainable-and-inclusive-growth.html>.

¹²⁴ <https://www.apec.org/press/news-releases/2024/apec-advances-green-and-low-carbon-hydrogen-transition#:~:text=APEC%20member%20economies%20are%20laying,green%20and%20low%2Dcarbon%20hydrogen>.

¹²⁵ <https://www.apec.org/press/news-releases/2023/apec-prioritizes-clean-energy-transition-on-track-to-doubling-renewable-energy-mix>

¹²⁶ <https://www.apec.org/groups/som-steering-committee-on-economic-and-technical-cooperation/working-groups/energy>

Addressing the Effects of Climate Change

With increasing fossil fuel use, atmospheric carbon dioxide content, and average global temperature, APEC members are already facing the impacts of climate change. Recognizing this, the multinational organization has made multiple promises and plans. As part of the Putrajaya Vision 2040, APEC is committed to promoting economic policies, cooperation, and growth that support global efforts to address environmental challenges, including climate change, extreme weather, and natural disasters.¹²⁷ APEC leaders have also affirmed the importance of sustainable financing, capacity building, technical assistance, and innovation for members to face climate change issues.¹²⁸

To help member states face the threats of climate change, APEC develops and encourages policies and programs that promote capacity building and sustainable growth while allowing flexibility for members to implement policies consistent with their domestic and international obligations. Some examples of these policies include structural reform, facilitating trade in environmental goods and services, supporting public finance, including tax policy and rationalizing and phasing out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, creating sustainable infrastructure and transport, promoting sustainable growth across sectors, encouraging the development of cost-effective low and zero emissions technologies, providing insight into carbon pricing mechanisms, and ensuring energy security, access, reliability and resilience through energy transition.¹²⁹

In a further effort to assist member states in mitigating the negative effects of climate change, APEC has established several subsidiaries that focus on specific aspects of climate change. First, the APEC Climate Center (APCC) was established in 2005 to produce and provide accurate and reliable climate prediction information based on empirical analysis while conducting research and development for better technology in climate forecasting, which can help member states to anticipate changing climate in the future.¹³⁰ Second, the Emergency Preparedness Working Group (EPWG) was formed to build capacity in

¹²⁷ https://www.apec.org/meeting-papers/leaders-declarations/2020/2020_aelm/annex-a

¹²⁸ <https://www.apec.org/meeting-papers/leaders-declarations/2022/2022-leaders-declaration>

¹²⁹ <https://aotearoaplanofaction.apec.org/strong-balanced-secure-sustainable-and-inclusive-growth.html>

¹³⁰ <https://www.apcc21.org/content/intro?lang=en>

the region so that APEC member economies can better mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies and natural disasters¹³¹ according to its Disaster Risk Reduction Action Plan.¹³² Third, the Agricultural Technical Cooperation Working Group (ATCWG) was established as part of an effort to protect the region's agricultural production and food security, which includes plans to adjust and mitigate the impact of climate change for APEC members.¹³³ Finally, the Oceans and Fisheries Working Group (OFWG) that was formed in 2011 aims to implement initiatives and programs that enhance the fisheries and marine industry's resilience towards climate change while promoting sustainable and efficient management.¹³⁴

¹³¹<https://www.apec.org/groups/som-steering-committee-on-economic-and-technical-cooperation/working-groups/emergency-preparedness>

¹³² https://mddb.apec.org/Documents/2016/EPWG/SDMOF/16_epwg_sdmof_003.pdf

¹³³<https://www.apec.org/groups/som-steering-committee-on-economic-and-technical-cooperation/working-groups/agricultural-technical-cooperation>

¹³⁴<https://www.apec.org/groups/som-steering-committee-on-economic-and-technical-cooperation/working-groups/ocean-and-fisheries>

Possible Solutions

As previously described, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) has made multiple commitments, targets, and efforts to support reducing fossil fuels, transitioning to renewable energy, and mitigating the negative impacts of climate change. Despite this, further and concrete steps can still be taken by the organization for its members. It is worth noting, however, that APEC's mission is to promote free trade. Furthermore, it does not have binding enforcing abilities upon its members, nor does it respect domestic priorities, as laid out in the Non-Binding Just Energy Transition Principles for APEC Cooperation.¹³⁵

Reducing Fossil Fuel Use

APEC could further its efforts to reduce fossil fuel use by introducing new targets for different fossil fuels, including oil, gas, and coal, for the region and its members. These targets should be based on member states' interests, capabilities, and agreement and accompanied by incentives to achieve them. For example, countries that meet these targets could benefit from reduced customs fees.

Another way for countries to reduce fossil fuel emissions is to impose carbon pricing, which means charging products or industries based on their carbon footprint. To establish this, the organization can partner with other international or non-governmental organizations to monitor energy-intensive productions that still use fossil fuels and engage with national governments or other member states to charge the products of those industries, which could be done through Value-Added Tax or increased customs fees. A challenge to this method is the cooperation between actors in the system and the willingness of member states to charge additional taxes, which can reduce the demand and supply of the products.

¹³⁵ Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), "Non-Binding Just Energy Transition Principles for APEC Cooperation," *APEC Energy Ministerial Meeting Papers*, October 20, 2023, <https://www.apec.org/meeting-papers/sectoral-ministerial-meetings/energy/13th-apec-energy-ministerial-meeting/non-binding-just-energy-transition-principles-for-apec-cooperation>.

Finally, reducing fossil fuel emissions could also be achieved through capacity building and education. APEC could support programs, workshops, symposiums, or campaigns that run from high-level individuals to grassroots movements to spread awareness of the negative effects of fossil fuels and affordable efforts to reduce their consumption. One thing to consider for this solution is the effectiveness of smaller programs and decisions on audience targeting.

Investing in Sustainable Energy

To complement the efforts to reduce fossil fuel consumption, APEC can also support the other end of the transition by providing incentives to transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources. One way to do this is by providing economic and trade incentives for countries or products that use green energy. For example, the organization could set a target for a share of the annual national budget allocated to the energy transition. Countries that satisfy such targets could be granted reduced trading or customs fees, while those who do not may be charged a higher price. On the other hand, APEC can move to a smaller scale by reducing the cost of trade for individual industries, producers, or products that are environmentally friendly or use renewable energy for their production. To do this, APEC should collaborate with national governments and local organizations to monitor the production process and certify the energy used before imposing higher or lower charges on those products.

Another mechanism that can support the transition to renewable energy is creating a mutual fund between member states to help countries in need of financial assistance. Since the transition is costly for some countries with lower incomes, a mutual fund involving contributions from all members could be sourced and close such a gap in funding. Although this may help all members transition to renewable energy and benefit everyone in the long term, member states that have to pay more may disagree and not support the move.

Furthermore, the transition to green energy can be accelerated through intergovernmental and public-private partnerships for member states. APEC could be the bridge between member states to engage in bilateral

conversations that may lead to investments or funding for energy transition projects. It could also initiate talks between the public and private sectors through discussions, conventions, or meetings that would allow the more-resourced private sector to fund or support public projects in the green energy sector.

Increasing and decreasing the price of renewable energy can also be a solution. This could be done through regional or bilateral agreements to reduce barriers to the production and distribution of green energy infrastructure between member states. For example, the organization could initiate a limit on customs fees or simplified paperwork on solar power materials that exit and enter the region.

Finally, APEC can also support individual programs, initiatives, workshops, policy discussions, and movements to increase awareness of the transition. It could sponsor or create new ones while providing technical or informational support that would allow participants to learn the benefits of renewable energy and accessible ways to adopt them based on local contexts.

Supporting Climate Change Mitigation

While adopting solutions that could reduce the cause of climate change is critical, efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change are also important. First, APEC could establish an emergency fund for countries facing natural disasters due to climate change. This would be sourced from member states and distributed to a member in times of urgency under the consent of all other members, with the amount and limitations left to the decision of the committee.

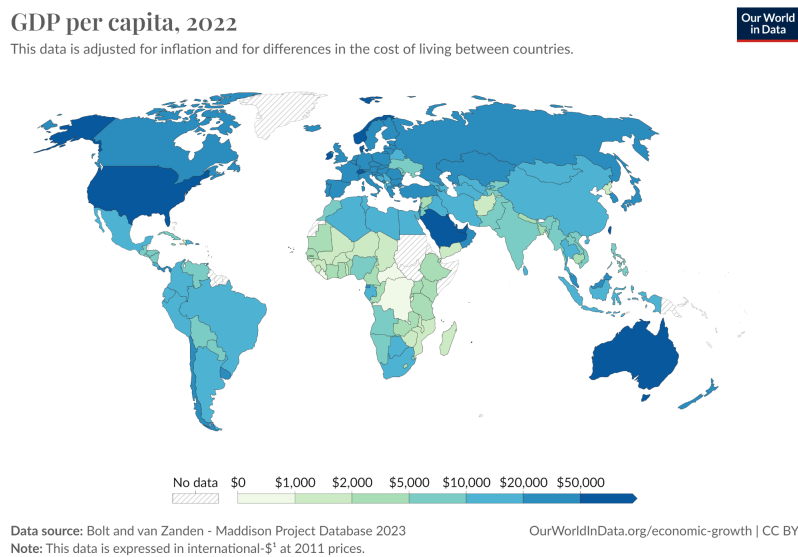
Second, APEC could further increase research and development cooperation between states to allow a better understanding of climate change and its impacts on smaller or local areas within member states. Since the APEC Climate Center was established, the organization could expand its location and outreach to provide more localized information and build a wider network with member states' related organizations to allow direct access to national governments.

Finally, APEC could support and initiate programs that help mitigate climate change effects in member states. This would include workshops, policy discussions, and grants that are aimed at researching climate change impacts and means to mitigate them, subsidizing transition to more climate-resilient technology, systems, or mechanisms, and building infrastructures that could dampen the negative effects of climate change. Since APEC already has working groups that focus on ocean and maritime issues as well as agricultural resilience, the committee could also consider other areas in the economy where climate change mitigation would be helpful.

Bloc Positions

Income Level

As climate change continues to impact more people in the region and efforts to reduce carbon emissions become more widespread, funding is one of the main contentions of debate. One of the measures for this is GDP per capita. Countries with higher GDP per capita are likely to have higher incomes, which translates to more resources available to fund the transition to renewable energy. As the population earns more income, the government is able to gain more income through taxes that can be used to publicly subsidize the transition, while the population has more income to spend on green technologies, such as solar panels and electric vehicles. On the other hand, countries with lower GDP per capita will have fewer resources available to support the transition. The picture below shows the different levels of GDP per capita around the world in 2022.



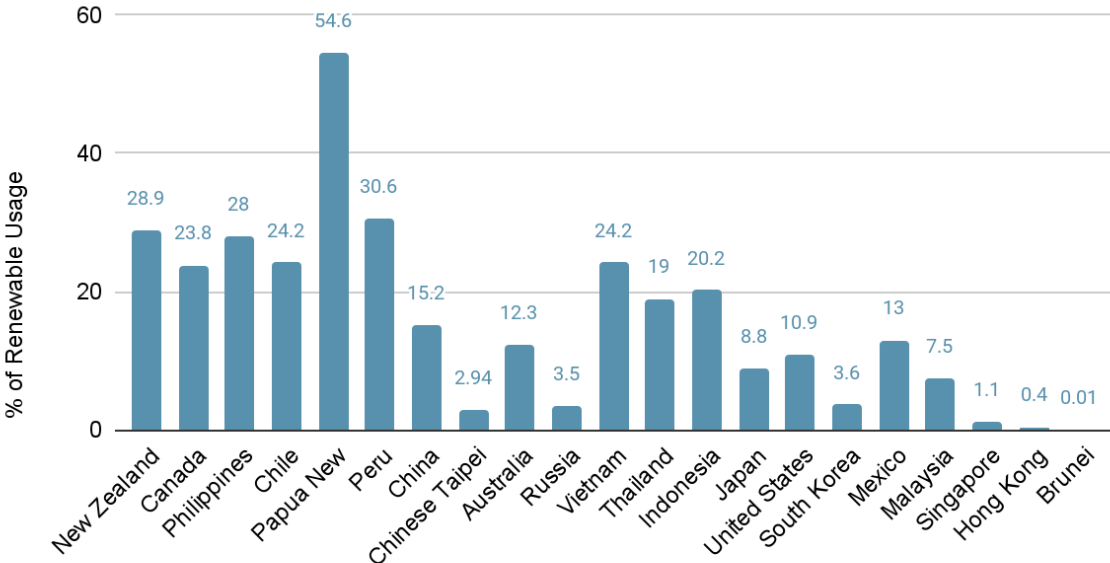
World GDP per Capita in 2022

Based on the GDP per capita data above, APEC members fall in a relatively narrow range. However, the extremes within this range can still divide the committee into two blocs. On one hand, higher income countries may push harder for transition to green technology and impose harsher incentives. On the other hand, countries

with lower income may advocate for more funding to assist their transition and more flexible regulations or incentives as they balance economic growth and green transition. Countries that fall in the first category may include Australia, Canada, and the United States, while those that could follow the second group include Peru, the Philippines, and Vietnam.

Current Energy Use

Renewable Usage out of Total Energy Consumption



Data from World Bank statistics, 2021 and 2022

Another important factor to consider when encouraging a mass shift toward renewable energy adoption in an effort to slow global carbon emissions is the current energy usage of each nation. While some states are more advanced in renewable energy adoption and already consume a great share of their national energy from these sources, others lag and remain largely dependent on fossil fuels.

There is a large variance in the types of energy consumption among APEC member states. There are some states who predominantly rely on fossil fuels as an energy source and have very limited renewable energy

usage. These states will have a more difficult time switching to renewable energy, and because of this will likely advocate for greater flexibility and incentives as they shift toward adopting green policies and renewable technology. Other APEC states already have high shares of renewable energy usage out of their overall energy consumption, and will likely take a lead in rigorously promoting the adoption of green technology throughout the region. The first category includes members like Brunei, Hong Kong, and Singapore, and this second bloc includes countries like Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, Chile, and Canada.

Glossary

Biodiversity: Biodiversity, or biological diversity, refers to the variety of life in the world or in a particular habitat or ecosystem.

Zoonotic diseases: These are infectious diseases of humans which are caused by a pathogen that can jump from a non-human to a human and vice versa. These include diseases such as Ebola and salmonellosis.

Liberalization: This refers to the removal or loosening of restrictions.

Energy Working Group: APEC's Energy Working Group (EWG), launched in 1990, seeks to maximize the energy sector's contribution to the economic and social well-being of the people in the APEC region, while mitigating the environmental effects of energy supply and use.

Asia Pacific Energy Research Centre: The Asia Pacific Energy Research Centre (APEREC) was established in July 1996 in Tokyo following the directive of APEC Economic Leaders in the Osaka Action Agenda. The primary objective of APEREC is to conduct research to foster understanding among APEC members of regional energy outlook, market developments and policy.

Putrajaya Vision 2040: APEC adopted the Putrajaya Vision 2040 during the 27th APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in Malaysia, which will guide APEC's work for the next 20 years. This long-term blueprint aims for an "open, dynamic, resilient and peaceful Asia-Pacific community by 2040, for the prosperity of all our people and future generations."

Non-Binding Just Energy Transition Principles for APEC Cooperation: These are a set of principles geared towards promoting efforts to advance clean energy transitions within the APEC region that meaningfully engage the workforce, private sector companies and investors, and communities in an equitable and inclusive way. The stated principles are: Take into account domestically defined economic growth priorities.

1. Pursue positive environmental, social, and economic outcomes.
2. Deliver domestically defined equitable benefits.
3. Support inclusion and gender equality.
4. Create resilient firms, institutions, and communities.
5. Provide support for decent work and workforce development.
6. Promote healthy lives and well-being for all.

Value-Added Tax: This is consumption tax that is levied on the value added at each stage of a product's production and distribution.

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