YALE MODEL UNITED NATIONS
CHINA

Specialized
Topic Guide

APEC

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

Yale Model United Nations China III

May 15-17, 2026

Table of Contents

Letter from the Dais

Greetings Delegates,

Thank you for your interest in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Committee, or APEC for short! We are super excited to have some great conversations throughout our sessions, ranging from fiscal policies to mutual aid to developing countries. APEC is a specialized committee for this year's conference to challenge delegates to step outside of traditional economic policymaking and to imagine ambitious futures for the global economy. Differing from the World Trade Organization, APEC is a voluntary forum for regional cooperation and encourages open trading practices. As a multinational trade bloc, it aims to establish new markets for agricultural products and raw materials beyond Europe. When world leaders come together, they exchange ideas and create diplomacy for long-term growth. As uncertainty grows in the face of new technologies and demand shifts, it is crucial that we ignite these conversations now and create dialogue in clashing perspectives. What role should conservatism in economics play in a fast-paced global market? In what ways should we be skeptical of progressive ideologies and test their pragmatism? These are the types of questions that the committee imagines the delegates will be debating on and encourages those often difficult conversations. This year's forum will be a little different from the previous in that two people will be representing one party and dividing the work as teammates, also known as a double-delegate committee.

As a quick introduction: my name is Jason Jiang (江盛辉）, and it is truly an honor to serve as your committee director this year and to get to know everyone! I am currently a first-year student at Yale and planning on majoring in the History of Science, Medicine, and Public Health. My major studies the intersections of how we can apply the historical context of medical development with the barriers it faces today, which may sound similar to the themes of our committee. The process of developing this committee has challenged me to think critically about the intricacies of economics, and I hope it will do the same for you. I am excited for all the amazing ideas you all will create, and never hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or concerns. I cannot wait to see everyone in Shenzhen!

Warmly,
Jason Jiang
j.jiang@yale.edu

Committee History

Originally established in 1989 by Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is a multinational forum that aims to bring world leaders together to discuss how we can bring economic prosperity to the region. The forum was inspired by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), where Hawke saw the impact and feasibility of developing economies coming together to have dialogues on trade. The accomplishments of ASEAN includes combatting Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia, securing Brunei as its 6th member, and much more that was bringing free trade. The spirit of APEC has always been about its unique "non-binding" approach to diplomacy, where participating representatives, named member economies, agree to voluntary commitments and trade policies. The main tensions of the forum have been the debates over the benefits of a structured trade agreement versus a consultative approach. As we look toward our conference this summer, the committee draws on a legacy of initiatives from APEC, such as the 1994 Bogor Goals for free trade and the more recent Putrajaya Vision 2040. Both of these policies have been aimed towards reducing tariffs for goods in the Asia-Pacific region and creating trade blocs so that social benefits are brought to member economies instead of the West, namely the European Union (EU). These social benefits allow for better education for member economies and produce more productive members of society, which has been historically credited to the West.

Currently, the members of APEC consist of Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong (China), Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, and many more. The impact of the APEC committee is substantive because these trading blocs and policies serve as the blueprint for future treaties and national laws across its 21 member economies. To paint a broader picture, the committee's work directly influences the livelihoods of almost 3 billion people and more than 60% of the global GDP! Given that this is a specialized committee for the conference, delegates will represent both member economies and influential figures on the world stage who have varying economic viewpoints. Some want more free trade, while others think that the free markets are harmful. The goal of the sessions is so that delegates can engage with a variety of opposing economic plans and come to appreciate them to synthesize their own resolutions. At the same time, what makes the committee's structure unique is its heavy reliance on "National Intelligence" reports. Rather than a standard debate, the committee functions as a high-stakes simulation where delegates receive frequent Special Reports from their analysts to show market research on metrics such as market fluctuations, trade disputes, and geopolitical shifts. In this way, delegates simulate the role of national leaders and economic ministers who must process a constant stream of intelligence to protect their own industries while negotiating under the table.

Committee Members

China: The member economy of China is concerned with the long-term political implications of economic policies. As a nation, China wants to establish strong national security and domestic innovation, and is known for its high-tech electronics and heavy machinery development.

United States of America: The member economy of the United States is concerned with the social benefits of economic policies. As a nation, the US is prioritizing foreign interventions overseas and wants to lower inequality while maintaining a free market.

Russia: The member economy of Russia is currently looking to renew morale. Russia seeks to enhance economic security and wants to protect the oil industry. The nation is a known ally of China.

Canada: The nation seeks to build an international coalition, which focuses on peace and support. Canada seeks to continue to remove federal trade barriers to protect its economy and seeks to invest in AI and critical minerals.

New Zealand: The member economy of New Zealand has recently deprioritized the free market, and the government is focused on building social safety networks for its citizens. As a nation, New Zealand is known for having a harsh lockdown during COVID and investment into rural economies.

Mexico: The member economy of Mexico is in pursuit of new economic policies and is uninterested in engaging with the US. The current government prioritizes social welfare, public investment in infrastructure, and strengthening state-owned enterprises like PEMEX.

Philippines: The member economy of the Philippines is focused on post pandemic recovery through infrastructure development and agriculture modernization. The national government is easing business regulations and prioritizing sustained growth for medium-sized companies.

Japan: The member economy of Japan is oriented towards becoming a higher-income nation and has a goal of not raising taxes on its citizens. The government wants to increase the country's subsidies to its citizens.

Republic of Korea: The member economy of South Korea is led by mostly democratic leaders who want to expand the government's budget and create more social safety nets. The nation is investing in AI and semiconductors and wants more labor flexibility.

Malaysia: the member economy of Malaysia is focused on diversifying its growth in a variety of different sectors and becoming a higher-income country. The main goals for the government is to maintain the state's independence status and continue the success of its electrical equipment and tourism industry.

Singapore: The member economy of Singapore is interested in creating new policies to protect Singaporean companies from accessing the free market. The government is committed to maintaining high human capital and ensuring energy security.

Vietnam: The member economy of Vietnam wants to sustain high growth and shift from low-cost manufacturing to high-tech innovation. The nation is open to fostering international trade partnerships and has the goal to make the country into a high-middle-income economy by 2030.

Indonesia: The member economy of Indonesia is focused on using its natural resources to drive its industries and wants raw materials to be processed domestically to boost exports. The government is committed to infrastructure development and aims to become one of the world's top five economies by 2045.

Thailand: The member economy of Thailand is currently prioritizing the "Bio-Circular-Green" model to promote sustainable and inclusive growth across all industrial sectors. The nation is dedicated to revitalizing its tourism industry while simultaneously transforming into a regional hub for electric vehicle manufacturing

Australia: The member economy of Australia is focused on transitioning toward a green energy superpower by investing heavily in renewable energy exports like critical minerals. The government is focused on strengthening regional security through strategic defense partnerships while maintaining robust trade relations.

YALE MODEL UNITED NATIONS
CHINA

Specialized
Topic Guide

1 Topic One

The Digital Horizon and Its Exploitation

Introduction

As APEC member economies carry out the vision of the Aotearoa Plan of Action, artificial intelligence, in the name of economic advancement, begins to reproduce inequalities in developing countries. Delegates are tasked to create solutions for systemic algorithmic biases and imagine what guidelines should be put in place to protect marginalized people.

Glossary

- **Fiscal policy**- the use of government spending and taxation to influence economic conditions, such as demand, inflation, and growth.
- **Trade bloc**- a group of countries, usually in a specific region, that form an agreement to reduce or eliminate trade barriers like tariffs and quotas among themselves, fostering closer economic integration, easier trade, and increased investment, while sometimes maintaining higher barriers for non-member countries.
- **Artificial Intelligence**- the application of computer systems able to perform tasks or produce output normally requiring human intelligence, especially by applying machine learning techniques to large collections of data.
- **Digital Colonialism**- the use digital technology, infrastructure, and platforms by dominant nations or multinational corporations to exert economic, social, and political control over developing nations
- **Data localization**- the practice of storing and processing data within the country where it was collected, driven by national laws and regulations
- **Data Labelling**- the process of detecting, annotating, and assigning meaningful labels to raw data such as images, text files, videos, or audio to provide context so that machine learning (ML) models can learn from it
- **Extraterritorial laws**- national laws applied to individuals, entities, or conduct outside a country's own borders

- **Ghost workers**- an individual listed on a company's payroll who does not actually work for the organization
- **Redlining**- a systemic, discriminatory practice in which financial institutions and insurers deny or limit services
- **Economic mobility**- the ability of individuals or families to change their economic status over time, either within their own lifetime or across generations
- **Advanced economies**- a nation with a highly developed post-industrial economic system that produces a high standard of living, widespread access to technology, and a dominant service sector
- **Biometric data**- a type of data that is related to the unique physical characteristics of individuals, such as fingerprints, facial features, or voice patterns, used for identification, authentication, and access control purposes

Topic History

The evolution of APEC from just economic dialogue on physical trade to becoming a powerhouse of the digital markets today relies on the growing importance of data collection. To understand why we are discussing matters of digital exploitation of developing countries and algorithmic bias in 2026, we have to trace back how this forum's arguments about tariff codes for rice and steel became the precursor for the ethics of machine learning and artificial intelligence.

The forum started during a time when the world only viewed the Asia-Pacific region as a label given by the West, rather than the economic prosperity and manufacturing that people think of today. To combat these problems, the first twelve member economies wanted to create more connections so that the forum could last long term and to make a name for themselves. Therefore, the forum co-wrote the 1994 Bogor Goals to set a precedent for free and open trade by 2010 for developed economies and 2020 for developing ones. This included unilateral tariff reduction rather than exclusive trade blocs where members traded with each other. One problem that came about was how the cost of shipping also needed to decrease, so there was a push for paperless trading, where they started investing in data-collecting machines.

The development of the internet during the 2000s expedited this process, and eventually, the 2011 APEC Cross-Border Privacy Rules (CBPR) system was created to allow personal data flow freely between 21 different legal jurisdictions while maintaining a protection mechanism to prevent cyber attacks. The impact of this was unexpected, and many reports show that the global data flows grew by 50% annually during this time of innovation (APEC 2016). While developed economies like the US and South Korea built the infrastructure to process this data, developing economies became the primary suppliers of the raw information used to train the global algorithms. There were not many mentions of digital exploitation until the planning of the Putrajaya Vision 2040 and the Aotearoa Plan of Action, where APEC formally recognized that digitalization needs to accelerate to meet market demands. The rapid deployment of AI and commonly known Large Language Models (LLMs) such as OpenAI created a new power dynamic. This occurs when data is being sent from the Global South to train models in the Global North, but the same models are sold back to the South at a premium, sometimes without their consent. An additional layer of these problems is that experts noticed that these models, which were being used to streamline customs or manage resources in APEC economies, often carry algorithmic biases. These models, predominantly trained on Western datasets, have been found to reinforce social hierarchies and beauty standards.

As there are more and more ethical concerns rising every day on the internet, it is important for us to consider the perspectives at hand. This topic represents the current stages of the debate where questions of sovereignty and right to privacy remain unanswered. When people think of colonialism, they often think of physical land grabs and erasure of cultures, but this debate focuses on the impacts in a different domain. The encroachment of data in developing countries could also be considered inequality, where technological companies control infrastructure to exert their own political agendas. The protests occurring outside the forum today are not against technology itself but rather against its exclusionary nature. It is about how we can build a collaborative infrastructure that respects cultural nuances and prevents the digital divide.

Current Situation

As we convene here today, we stand at a precipice of change. The promise of the Putrajaya Vision 2040 to create an open and resilient community is being bombarded by the deployment of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Because the member economies represent over 60% of global GDP, the benefits of this new movement are not being distributed equally, leading to what experts now call the "Great Digital Divergence." The divergence refers to how some member economies are experiencing tremendous growth from digitalization while others are falling behind. The resource gaps deepens with the speed of innovation and it moves beyond the conversation of development. Let us analyze this further.

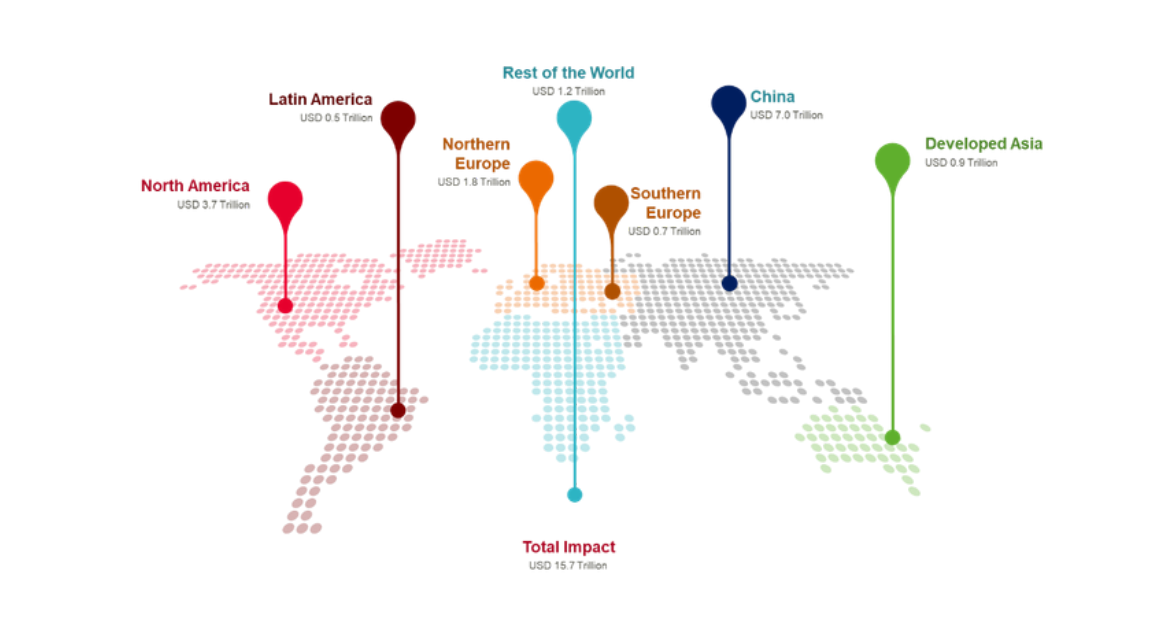

Figure 1: The figure above shows the data visualizing the potential value added to the global economy by 2030 due to Artificial Intelligence, with the potential additional GDP impact (incremental value) rather than current total GDP (McKinsey Global Institute).

Current Macroeconomic Situation:

While the global GDP has been stable around 2.7-3.1 %, the steadiness has been due to huge surges in business investment in industries such as AI. Consumer spending has been decreasing after the COVID-19 pandemic and tariff volatility, but capital expenditures by tech giants act as a shock absorber. This level of technological adoption is historically disinflationary because it lowers the costs to produce goods. However, it seems like this is not the case, as a great demand has been created for specialized hardware and skilled labor for these investments. While the overall hiring has cooled down globally, job postings requiring AI skills are showing nearly 45% growth in sectors like data analytics (McKinsey Global Institute). This means that early career roles could be vulnerable to being replaced by automation, but that the job market is flexible to shift.

In early 2026, AI usage and planning have been through the roof with APEC, where in the 2026 APEC Economic Policy Report (AEPR), it was said that "AI-driven digital transformation is no longer a choice but an economic imperative," and it will grow the regional GDP by 3.1% this year. China now owns nearly 70% of global AI patents, and the United States remains the leader in private investment, with tech firms projected to spend $500 billion on data center infrastructure by the end of this fiscal year. This has a huge importance for the advanced economies because almost 60% of their jobs are exposed to AI and are currently implementing it (IMF). In contrast, in Papua New Guinea, rural Indonesia, and other developing economies, exposure is lower, around 16-24%. The lack of digital infrastructure in these countries means that these economies are becoming data exporters and do not make a lot of profit when they are not able to sell these digital products.

2026 is also the year that investors are looking for returns on their investment after three years of AI campaigns. Investors are turning away from companies that only tailor products towards AI and to products that have the potential to expand to different markets, such as private equity. If AI productivity begins to go up, this could create a historic expansion similar to the discovery of the internet in the 1990s, when APEC was first created. On the other hand, if the investments do not show any earnings, there is a likely risk for a bubble correction, rapid descalation of asset values with investors pulling back investments, that could take out 0.4% of global growth.

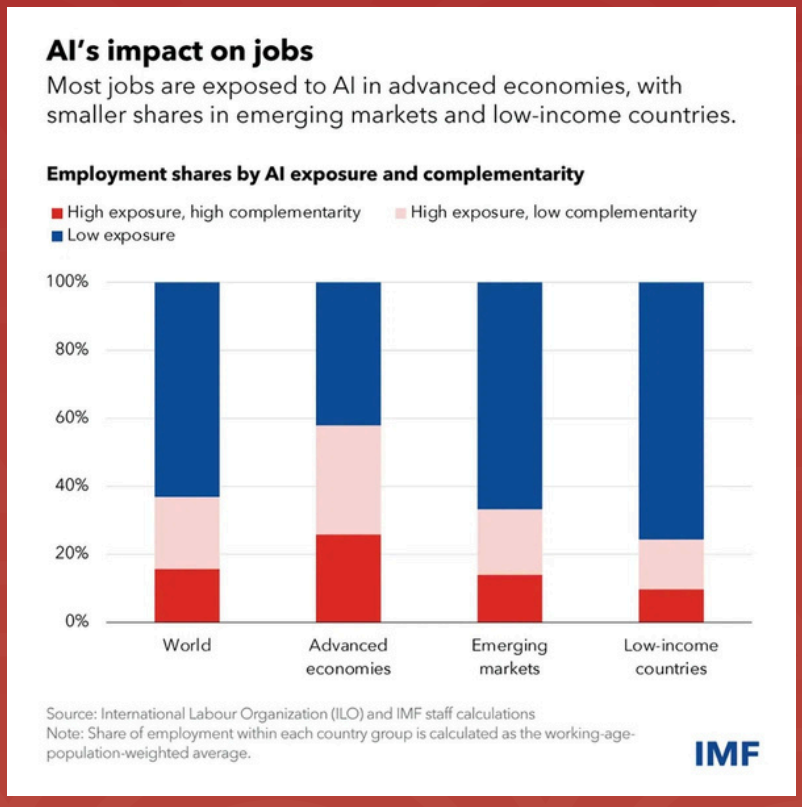

Figure 2: The figure above shows how different types of economies are positioned to either benefit from or be disrupted by AI based on their labor market structures where complementarity means aiding in productivity of workers (IMF).

Key Points of the Current Crisis:

II. Data Extraction and Concerns:

The concept of data extraction has been brought up many times now, and it is only right that we describe it in depth. The concept lies at the heart of the debate of labor rights protections versus the social benefits of technology. In 2026, we see time and time again how the global economy uses methods of extraction for minerals, but now, it is about data. Developing economies often find themselves in the situation where they have to provide behavioral and biometric data necessary to train advanced Large Language Models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT, yet they do not have the infrastructure to process the data. Because of this, the data is processed in the Global North and then large tech corporations only own the intellectual property rights to the algorithms they produced, and thus lead to the Global South never benefiting from the profit.

The impact of this is that it creates a model of dependency where, even if they supply the raw data needed to train the models, they still must pay a premium to access these models. In addition to paying these premiums, the models are still inaccessible. For instance, social media platforms such as Facebook and TikTok are integrating AI in their software, and 90% of the users are outside the United States. However, less than 15% of the safety and moderation resources for these platforms are in a language other than English. This highlights how data localization can be used as a form of economic self-defense to ensure that local constituents are the only ones to be able to use the models and that the product stays within the local economy.

For this committee, this can be seen as a direct threat to the Region Economic Integration, where there are no guidelines for data sovereignty when both parties can argue they have claims to the product. This could create difficulties for established trade blocs and translate to problems beyond just AI. When the cloud infrastructure is dominated by a couple of powerful multinational corporations, local startups in Jakarta or Lima are forced to build their businesses on foreign platforms. This makes them vulnerable to extraterritorial laws like the U.S. CLOUD Act and arbitrary service fees that can change any day and stifle innovation. This creates instability in business models for predicting start up costs and unequal power dynamics in the market.

II. Resource Allocation:

Along with these problems, there is also a human side to the story. Thousands of “ghost workers” are employed by these large tech firms in countries such as the Philippines, Vietnam, and Sudan to perform data labelling. These workers have to perform these stressful jobs with low wages and physiological trauma from filtering out violent content to content moderation, but have no way to

higher-skilled positions. This labor standard exists across most industries, but is a pressing issue for some of the member economies present today.

These models are not as invisible as people think they are because they actually carry a large environmental footprint, especially in developing countries. As news media outlets have begun reporting on this, a single large data center to keep these models running can consume up to 5 million gallons of fresh water for cooling. Once the water is used up, it can not be chemically processed for drinking and must be discarded for other use, and currently, there are no real solutions to this problem. The amount of water that is consumed by these centers is equal to the water needed for a town of 50000 people. In regions with water scarcity, such as Chile and Mexico, this has sparked a lot of local contention.

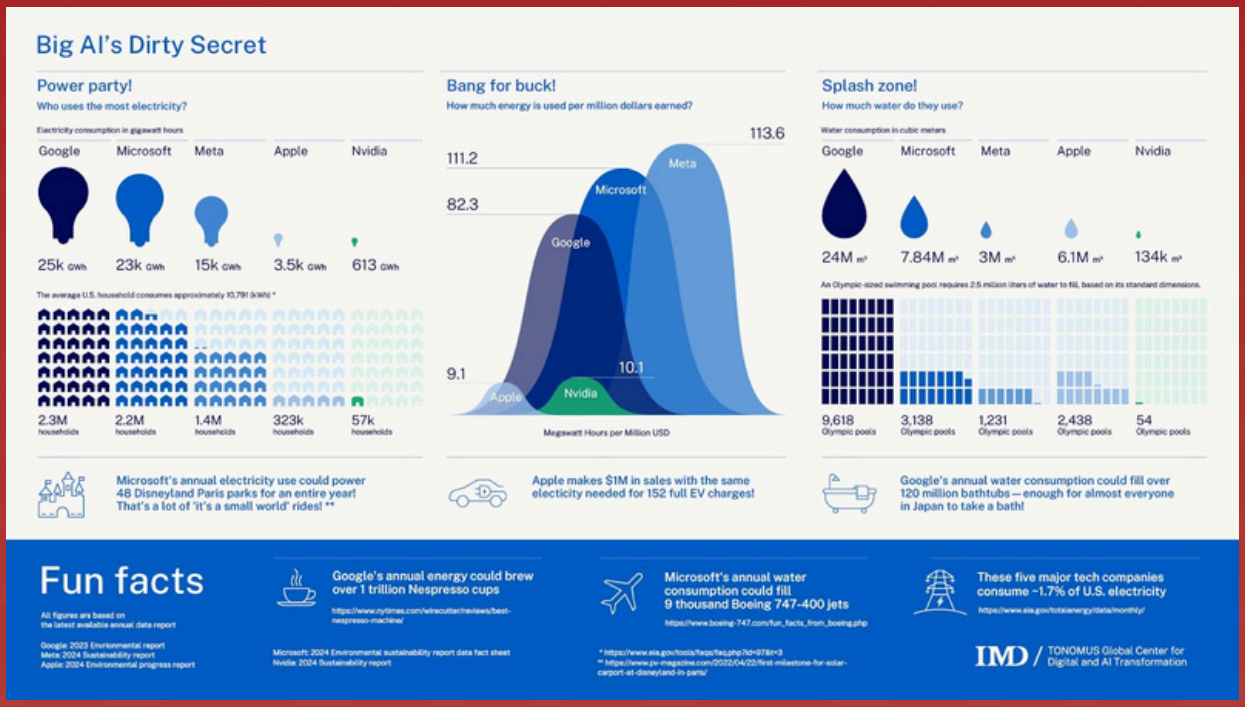

Figure 3: The figure above compares the annual electricity and water consumption of Google, Microsoft, Meta, Apple, and Nvidia. Facts in the margins may be used for speeches and are supposed to provide insight on the high energy intensity of data center operations (IMD).

Along with water use, there is an energy strain on power grids with the implementation of these centers, especially as they are being developed at a rapid speed. This would threaten the Aotearoa Plan of Action set by APEC, as these carbon neutrality goals may not be met when data centers use tons more energy than renewable energy infrastructure can currently provide. By the end of 2026, AI-related energy demand is projected to consume nearly 10% of the total electricity in these technologically advanced member economies. At the same time, there is no reason to doubt the fact that intensive training for these AI models can still increase as processes become more complex. The global infrastructure of data collection has always been strong, but the analysis just cannot keep up. Simultaneously, large tech firms rationalize this stage as just the beginning and that

that they are making the models more efficient to use fewer resources in the long term.

III. Algorithm Bias:

Bias can no longer just be seen as glitches anymore when they have real-world implications that encode inequality into the databases. This is antithetical to APEC's mission for inclusive growth and dangerous when it is being integrated into essential infrastructure such as border surveillance and healthcare informatics. The errors from the models can harm many citizens in both developing and developed countries.

One of the most obvious examples of this bias is the models in the financial sector, where APEC has pushed for digital trade. Many member economies now have used AI driven credit scoring to reach citizens who are not in their systems. Reports done just a couple of months ago showed that these models that are trained in the West have consistently penalized rural entrepreneurs and women. This happens because algorithms use proxy variables like educational background and ZIP codes to predict their credit worthiness. This reproduces the practices of redlining as variables such as ZIP codes are associated with particular racial groups due to segregation histories. The impact of this looks like the algorithm learning to associate lower-income or minority neighborhoods with high risk from the dataset and then denying loan opportunities for residents to have economic mobility.

Namely, in Southeast Asia, women are statistically more likely to have thin credit files due to traditional caregiving roles, and labeling this as high risk for giving out loans to women. Gender inequalities like this have implications for the workplace as well. With over 40% of APEC companies projected to use AI for recruitment, this can harm the labor market. Peer-reviewed studies have shown that AI hiring tools favor those with continuous work histories and degrees from Western universities. This creates a significant challenge for everyone, especially women, who take maternity/paternity leave and harm regional workers as most stay in the Asia-Pacific region for university.

In this way, human prejudice is being baked into machine learning in a way that reproduces inequalities in faster ways. Activists have been calling for active debiasing in these datasets, but combing through the data takes time and is sometimes viewed as less productive than creating new products. Delegates may argue that we need intersectional audits where we develop transparency reports on how models analyze data for different groups of people. In addition, the committee could create initiatives to incentivise debiasing in datasets through fiscal policies or national-level mandates. This really means that companies need to be proactive in their approach and not just wait for harm to happen and then fix it.

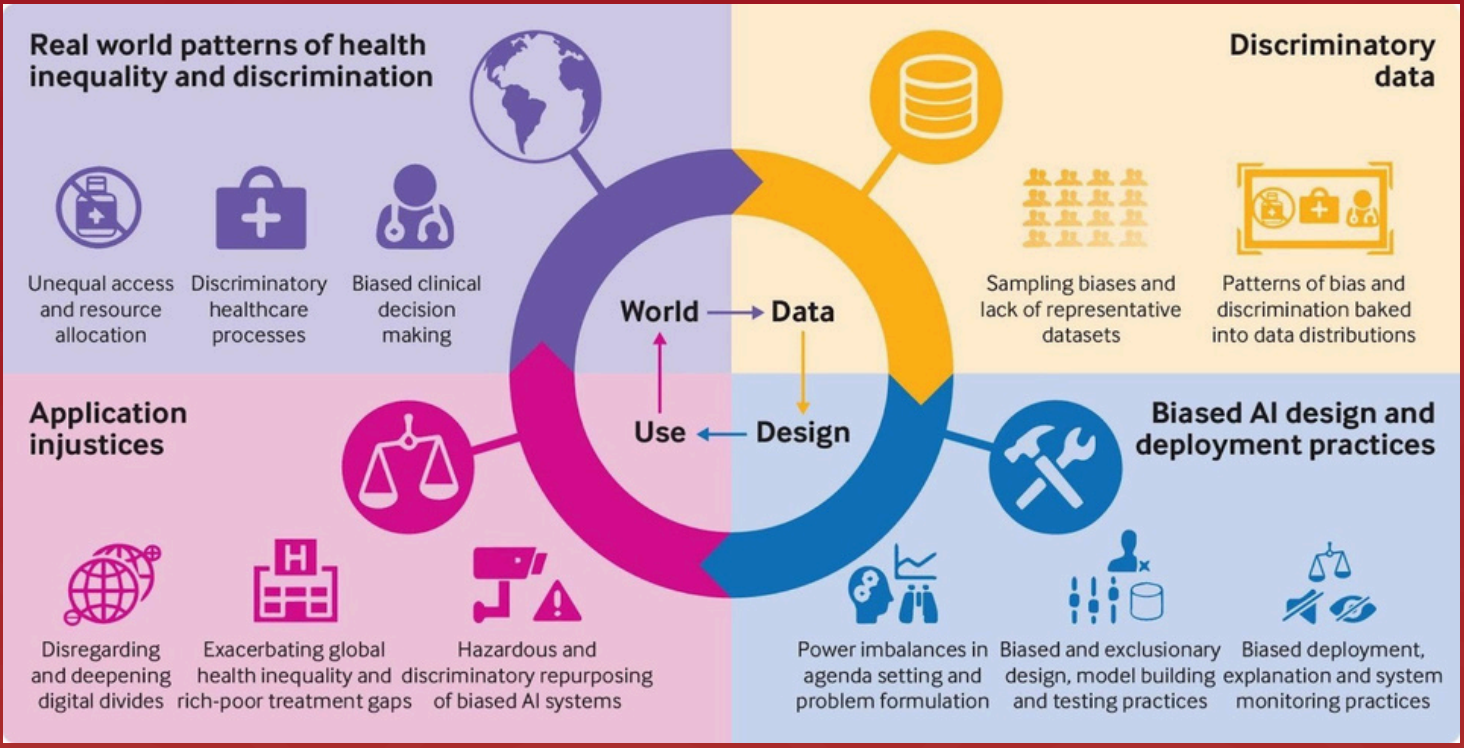

Figure 4: This infographic shows how the bias in the design of technologies can translate to real-life impacts in both finances and medicine (WHO).

IV: Other Concerns:

Indeed, there are other concerns that could be used for debate to discuss the impact of AI on other sectors, and the three points are not meant to be an exhaustive list. The committee looks forward to hearing these points being argued, but also encourages delegates to use the information to extrapolate new points to create directives. Other issues could be tied to the impact of AI on healthcare, as mentioned previously, or even talking about the cultural implications when models aren't culturally accurate to the Asia-Pacific region. The three points are meant to give a foundation to the key debates that are being had in APEC today.

APEC Response:

The primary way APEC has responded to these concerns is through the APEC Artificial Intelligence Initiative for 2026–2030. This is a framework to ensure that the AI Revolution aligns with the Putrajaya Vision 2040. It recognizes that AI could bridge or deepen the global digital divide, so the initiative shifts APEC's focus to active AI capacity building. With the theory in mind, member economies are creating more infrastructure investment, beginning to investigate legal guardrails for AI, and using technology as a tool for democracy to reach their constituents.

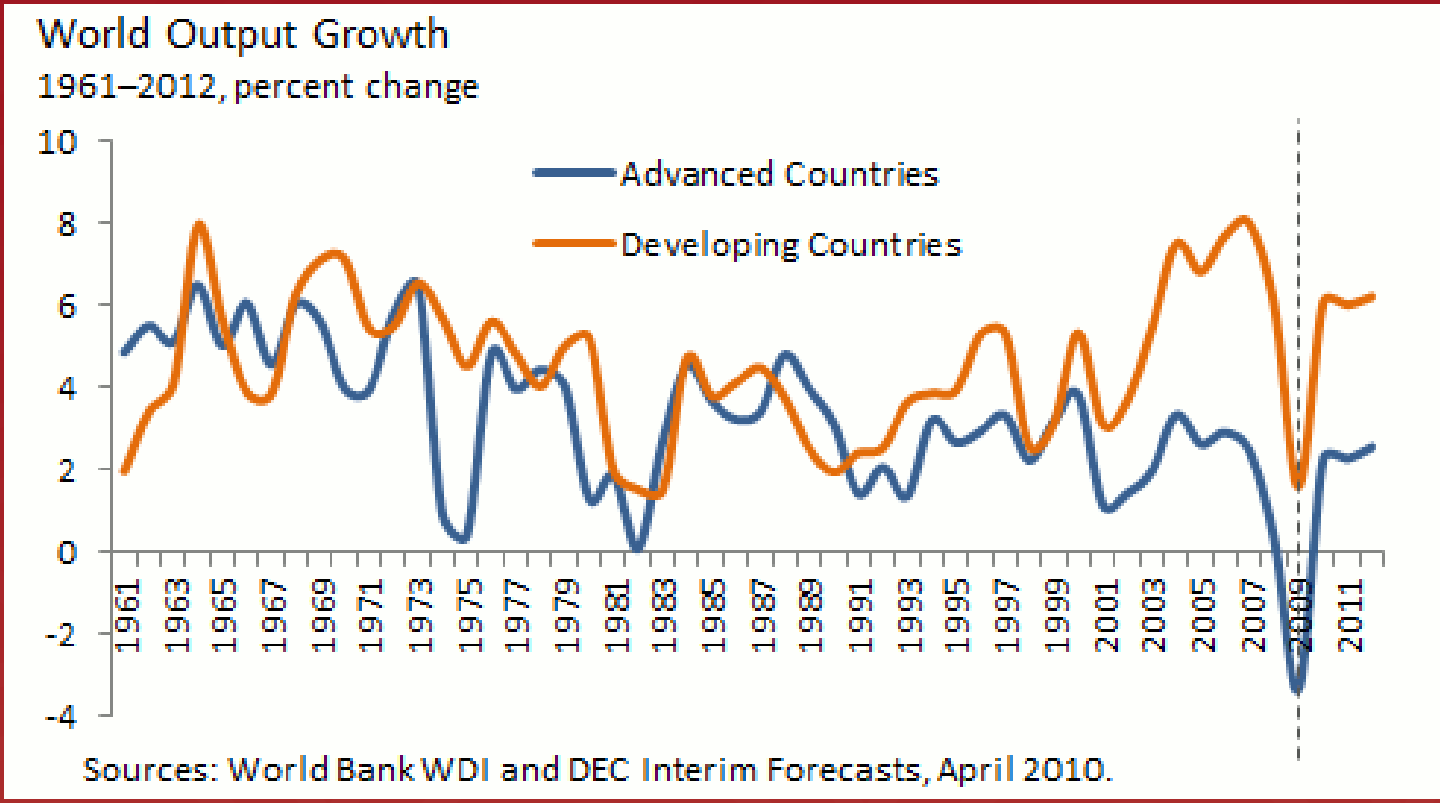

Figure 5: The graph above shows a long-term correlation between the economic cycles of advanced and developing nations where developing countries have consistently maintained higher trend growth rates relative to advanced economies since the early 2000s (World Bank).

At the center of this, APEC has created the APEC Centre of Excellence for Paperless Trade (ACCEPT) and the newly proposed Asia-Pacific AI Innovation Hub. These entities are meant to be the oversight to help this new technology transfer to all of the member economies. For instance, APEC has begun facilitating what is known as Compute Credit swaps, where advanced economies like the United States and Korea provide cloud processing power to MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) in developing economies. This means starts up in countries like Peru can train complex models with their data without worrying about the costs of building local server farms, as APEC initiatives take care of that.

Furthermore, there are more green initiatives that are taking place currently. Because of this, the Bangkok Goals on the Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) Economy have been updated to include Green AI Mandates. Due to the massive environmental toll of data centers, APEC is now incentivizing the use of AI for predictive energy management and demanding optimization from member economies. Member economies are collaborating on the APEC Resilient Infrastructure Fund, which prioritizes the construction of data centers powered by renewable energy rather than traditional sources like coal.

Pairing up with this, the APEC Human Resources Development Working Group

has initiated the"AI-Ready Workforce Roadmap for developing economies. This program focuses on lifelong learning specifically for women, youth, and rural workers who are most vulnerable to displacement. By the end of 2026, APEC aims to have trained 10 million citizens in AI Literacy for them to move beyond basic coding and have better economic mobility. This creates a more productive workforce for the Asia-Pacific region and lessens economic inequalities that have persisted throughout history.

Delegate's Mission:

As delegates represent your specific interests, the committee seeks to analyze the power dynamics at play. In the committee, information is your most valuable tool because, along with this background guide, member economies will be receiving real-time national intelligence reports through the sessions. For the Secretariats, they will receive a briefing note on what the current tensions are and the major talking points outside of the committee that are appearing on the news.

One moment you may be debating about trade, and the next second, there could be a digital blackout in your nation that will force you to think on your feet and create new strategies to address the pressing issue at hand. This means that there will be directives that can be drafted in the middle of the sessions to alleviate these issues, but in the spirit of a specialized committee, the goal is for delegates to produce a substantive resolution to tackle the main issues at hand. Some delegates might even have secret motives before coming into the committee that influence their talking points and strategies of negotiation. Remember, APEC is a voluntary forum that utilizes persuasion and not coercion. This will also be conveyed to them in their reports. At the same time, delegates are able to recognize their countries' advantages pertaining to the economy, such as manufacturing power and social safety nets.

Questions to consider:

1. In what ways has infrastructure changed for the Global South?
2. How do we increase the social benefit of machine learning while respecting cultural nuances?
3. Does innovation always sidestep human rights?
4. If an AI model results in systemic bias or economic harm in a member economy, what should be the legal or diplomatic consequence?
5. Should the committee step outside of its scope to prioritize aid for the Global South?
6. In the case that AI becomes completely integrated into the workforce, should regulations occur on the national or international level?
7. Why are developing countries ignored in the conversation of economic prosperity, and how can we change the narrative?
8. How is inflation impacted by these large demands for goods, and is that advantageous for the Asia-Pacific region?

Additional Resources:

https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/second-order-simulacrum-gender-and-racial-biases-ai-data

https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/364384/its-practically-impossible-to-run-a-big-ai-company-ethically

https://arxiv.org/pdf/2501.16946

https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/13636

https://arxiv.org/pdf/2501.17980

https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03080188.2020.1840225

https://www.healthcareitnews.com/news/how-ai-helping-fix-rural-and-native-american-health-challenges

https://journals.law.harvard.edu/crcl/wp-content/uploads/sites/80/2023/01/ANewAgeIndigenousInstrument.pdf

https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2024-01-29-expert-comment-urbanisation-s-role-climate-crisis-being-overlooked#:~:text=Urban%20land%20areas%20could%20more,cities%2C%20not%20even%20power%20them.

https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13347-022-00519-1

https://news.mit.edu/2022/how-ai-can-help-combat-systemic-racism-0316

YALE MODEL UNITED NATIONS
CHINA

Specialized
Topic Guide

2 Topic Two

Green Growth and Climate Displacement

Introduction

Sustainability has always been a hard word to define, and even the technology itself creates new problems. In this topic, delegates must analyze the ways these technologies can help combat climate change, but also how they may increase inequalities in ways we do not expect on the surface.

Glossary

- **Green Energy:** energy generated from clean and renewable sources such as solar and wind that produces little to no greenhouse gas emissions during production.
- **Structural Volatility:** an economic situation where disruptions are no longer temporary shocks but permanent due to systemic shifts in policy and climate.
- **Green Protectionism:** the strategic use of environmental regulations and carbon taxes by nations to safeguard their domestic industries from international competition under the guise of climate action.
- **Employee Expectation:** The evolving set of standards regarding safety, fair pay, and ethical treatment that workers anticipate from their employers as a baseline for satisfaction.
- **Downstream Manufacturers:** companies that operate in the later stages of a supply chain that focus on turning refined materials into finished products for distribution to end consumers.
- **Global North:** a term used to describe the group of wealthy, highly industrialized, and technologically advanced nations primarily located in the Northern Hemisphere.
- **G20 Nations:** An international forum of the world's 19 major economies plus the European and African Unions that collectively account for 85% of global GDP and 75% of international trade.
- **Deep-Sea Mining:** The process of extracting mineral deposits from the ocean floor at depths greater than 200 meters.

- **Decarbonization**: The systematic reduction or elimination of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions from an economy's industrial, energy, and transport sectors.
-
- **Financial Asymmetry**: A condition in which one party in a transaction or negotiation has significantly more or better information than the other, leading to an imbalance of power and potential market failure.
-
- **Exclusive Economic Zones** (EEZ): Marine areas extending 200 nautical miles from a coastal nation's shore, within which that nation has sovereign rights over the exploration and exploitation of natural resources.

Topic History

As this topic addresses the idea of green growth, it is important to keep in mind the history of the rhetoric of growth. How has society prioritized growth and disregarded its consequences lies within its history. For instance, some would argue the concept of growth at any cost began in the late 18th century, when Western nations like Great Britain built their wealth on carbon-intensive factory work. The very idea of industrialization and its prosperity is fueled by coal and extraction from colonial territories. The idea of *green* growth did not exist because the environment was viewed as a sink for the industrial waste of the factory process. However, it is because of this industrialization that climate change accelerated.

By the mid 1900s, scientists started to recognize the warming effect of greenhouse gases, which led to the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment. This was the first time economic development was connected to environmental degradation, which was shocking to the entire world. With worries about extinction and other natural disasters, the international attitude towards green energy began to shift. The global economy was always oriented towards growth, but now, more investors see green growth as a way to have both economic prosperity and environmental positivity.

This was also the time the APEC Green Growth Agenda took off in the 2000s, where member economies saw how the globe must decarbonize energy production. This led to the APEC List of Environmental Goods in 2012, where leaders agreed to cap tariffs at 5% or less on 54 specific environmental goods such as wind turbines. The result of this was that environmental goods accounted for 5.2% of total merchandise trade in the Asia-Pacific region in 2019 (APEC Secretariat). On the other hand, there was always a problem with access to resources because only some developed nations had access to buy these technologies in the first place. The transition of new green technologies requires investors to invest in needed minerals such as lithium, cobalt, and copper. The West wanted more green technologies, such as solar panels. APEC economies also had a vested interest in these minerals because member economies are responsible for almost 60% of global greenhouse gas emissions (APEC Secretariat). However, the burden of the transition was on developing member economies to provide these minerals. There were always suspected concerns with labor practices that the Global North has historically criticized. Developing economies argue that industrialized nations that have already succeeded using the old process are denying responsibility for their own actions and forcing these expensive technologies onto other nations through moral superiority.

Historically, harms due to climate change have impacted developing economies more through both direct and indirect displacement. Some see extreme weather coupled with rising sea levels, while others see their carbon-heavy industries having to shut down, and thousands lose their jobs in those industries. This resource scramble has changed the map of geopolitics because wealth often remains concentrated in the nations that utilize the technologies the most, while others suffer. Some argue that this is another form of inaccessibility because it is estimated that a country would need 4 trillion US dollars just to fund the infrastructure required to increase climate resilience across APEC cities to reach goals (APEC report, 2024). This money that needs to be spent could also be used to develop social safety nets, such as universal childcare and better healthcare systems.

The spirit of non-binding cooperation is being tested because how can the forum mandate countries to take action in the name of saving the planet but also balance peace. This topic is in the spirit of current APEC debates on green energy. More recently, the development of the Bangkok goals on Bio-Circular Green Economy in 2022 emphasized that waste from these carbon-intensive processes should be treated as a resource instead of purely focusing on eliminating it. It now serves as a blueprint for member economies such as Thailand and Vietnam to create sustainability, and the member economies are on track to double the share of renewable energy technologies by 2030. This proves that debates such as these create different perspectives on how to tackle climate change in a way that is inclusive and not exclusive.

Current Situation

The Asia-Pacific region stands at the crossroads of efficiency and geopolitical fragmentation for a green transition. Specifically, the February 2026 APEC Regional Trends Analysis (ARTA) shows the regional growth is staying steady at 3.1%, but does not show the full picture. Our supply chains are being dismantled right now due to structural volatility, where trade flows are dictated by national security and not price.

Macroeconomic Concerns:

This fiscal year is projected for a slow growth of 0.6% (WTO). For member economies, this means inventory systems become risks for investors if they choose to optimize costs. It does not necessarily matter if costs are low if products are not getting to the consumers. This crisis is being multiplied by climate change as well, with weather disasters influencing trade more than ever. These weather disasters manifest in ways such as disrupting manufacturing jobs and blocking the usage of critical waterways, such as the Panama Canal, with port congestion. Experts estimate that climate-related damages can account for almost 26% of regional GDP loss by the end of the century if global emissions remain high. The combination of the tariff problem and climate change presents a unique problem for APEC. The forum can do something about the climate change issue in order to protect trade from further global warming.

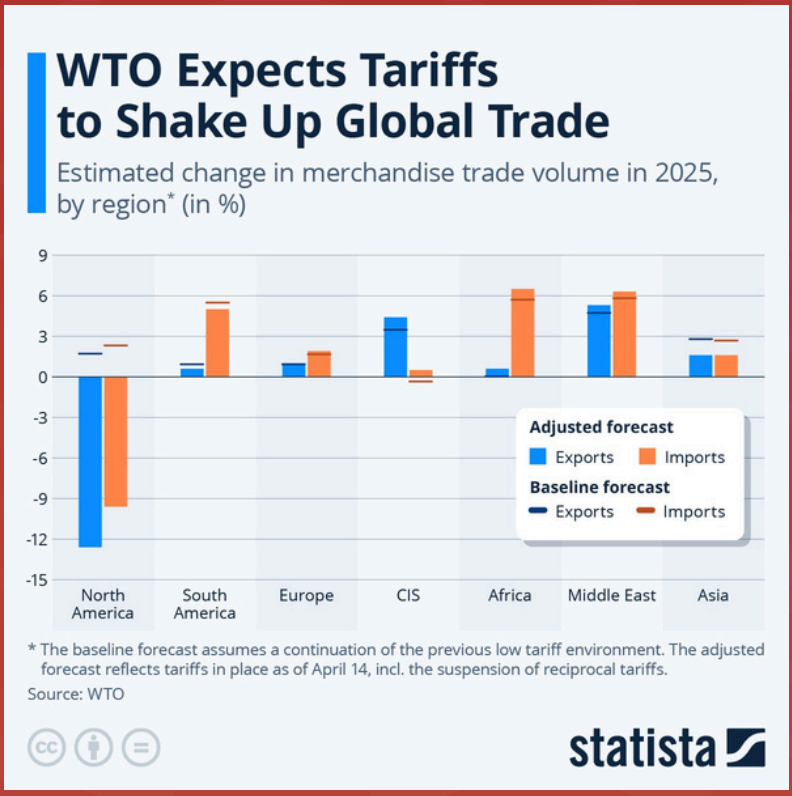

Figure 6: The graph above shows how tariff escalations impact trading volume for each of the continents, with notably North America experiencing the biggest adjustment (WTO).

The emergence of Green Protectionism prompts the European Union and North America to implement stricter environmental regulations, and the Asia-Pacific region wants to catch up to the progress. However, the cost of decarbonizing still remains too high and requires a sustainability framework from the forum that must be accessible. There are a few layers to the problem.

First, the race for critical minerals has reached an all-time high for both the green transition and the AI revolution. Besides the price correction in early 2026, resource security is still a pressing trade issue since nations such as China and the Democratic Republic of Congo are tightening export requirements on rare earth metals and cobalt. The primary causes for these regulations were due to the existing power dynamics in the market, where developed economies would have monopolies over green technologies. In this way, the regulations act as a form of resource nationalism where developing nations are using their minerals as a form of leverage in the trade negotiations in this fiscal year, which complicates multilateral cooperation for APEC. This also means the barrier to developing green technologies becomes higher as well.

Second, the boom of technologies such as artificial intelligence has changed the markets. AI-driven systems used to predict disruptions in the markets have favored investment forecasts for advanced economies over developing ones. This means investors in green infrastructure have put their money in economies that already have existing resources to develop those technologies. This has the potential to widen inequalities because digital literacy and infrastructure continue to exist at a gap. In addition, the resource overlap to develop AI and green technologies is significant, as they both need materials such as cobalt to be produced. Investors are choosing to invest in safer options such as AI to see quicker returns on investments, which leaves green infrastructure vulnerable to under-investment.

Thirdly, the labor element of supply chains creates another layer of problems for green technologies. Labor shortages in critical sectors such as energy and mining are continuing with an aging workforce and shifting employee expectations. This is deterring APEC from reaching its green agenda goals, where there is not enough research and production to decarbonize. At the same time, the transition away from fossil fuels is displacing workers in those industries due to upskilling and labor mobility. This is good on the surface for decarbonization, but it could mean even further labor shortages, specifically within the energy sector, for them to retain interest in the industry. The supply chain instability could cost the region its social stability for its workers. Beyond the macroeconomic facts, there are some unique perspectives to also consider at the heart of the green energy debate.

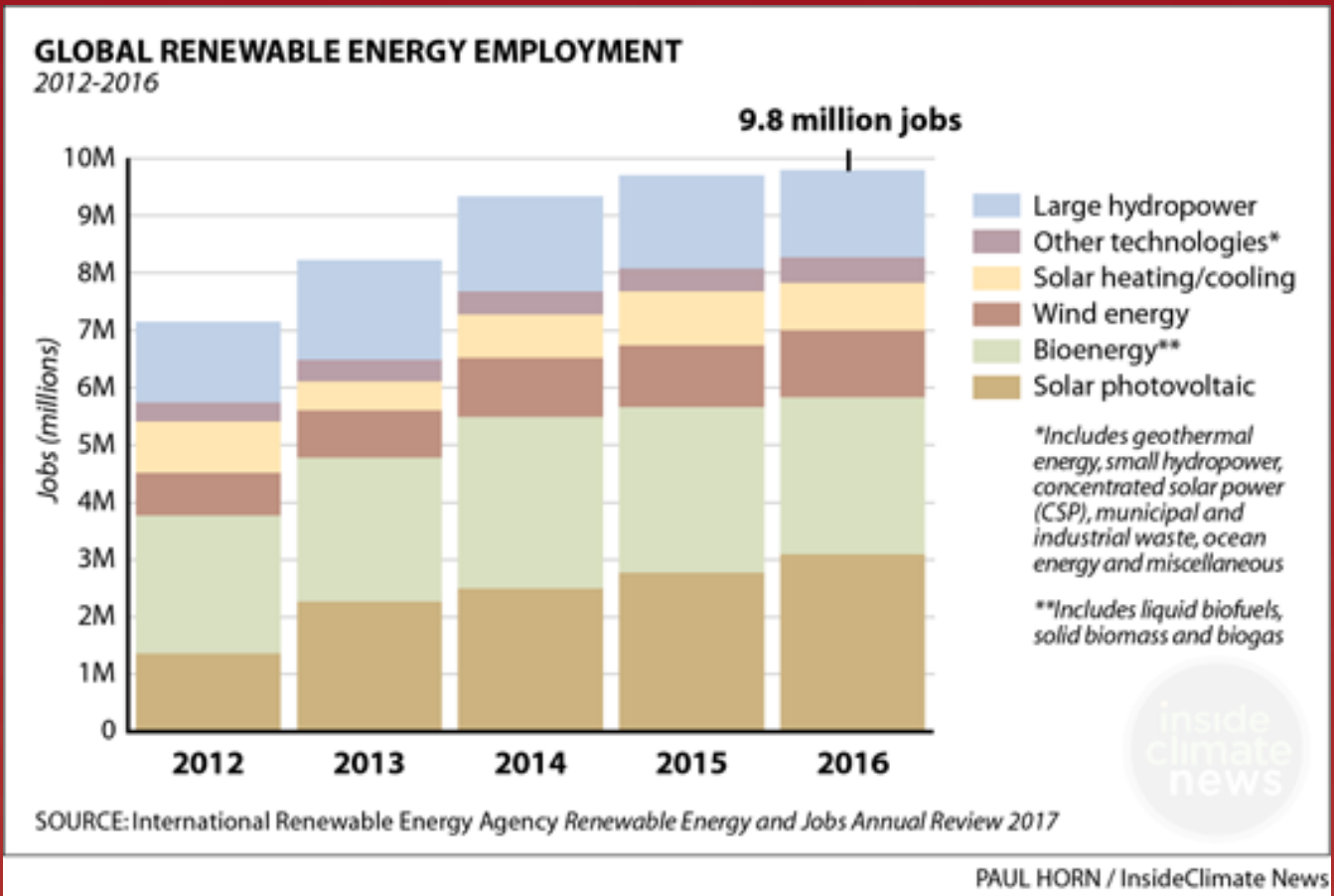

Figure 7: The bar graphs above show the distribution of sub-sectors of jobs and demands within the renewable energy industry. The makeup primarily consists of solar and bioenergy jobs (IREA 2017).

Key Points of the Crisis:

I. Protection for Labor Rights:

The global rush for decarbonization is argued to be fueled by the workers rights debates in the supply chain. As the region celebrates its leadership in electric vehicles and solar panel production, the raw materials required for these technologies, such as cobalt, nickel, and polysilicon, are linked to issues concerning labor rights. For example, in early 2026, solar panels remain as one of the top five imported products at risk of being produced with concerning labor practices in G20 nations, with an import value of 14.8 billion USD (International Renewable Energy Agency). This growing awareness on the international stage has not been enough for any tangible changes because there are state-sponsored programs to obtain these materials contracted for years down the line. Namely, the United States Department of State published how the silicon metal product process is nearly impossible to clean for downstream manufacturers. This poses a dilemma where companies may want to choose to alleviate climate change but also adhere to international law.

In the mining sector, the right to development debate persists as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) utilizes inhumane labor. The DRC serves as a vital supplier for the region's battery, but up to 30% of the cobalt from small-scale mines for those batteries has been reported to have either child labor or hazardous conditions (University of Nottingham, 2022). A significant portion of the workers face wage theft, unsafe conditions, and restrictions in union activity. Some argue that this is not just unique to the green energy sector, as many other industries, such as phones import the same materials.

II. Decarbonization Debt

The concept of decarbonization debt is the primary concern for developing APEC economies, where proponents argue that the net-zero carbon emission goal is happening on unequal playing fields. Developed nations have had centuries of industrialization, but are now limiting developing nations from having the same access to those processes. Economies such as Vietnam, Indonesia, and Thailand are feeling threatened as their sovereignty and poverty reduction policies depend on those processes.

In 2026, the Global North remains responsible for the majority of atmospheric carbon dioxide, but the Global South is being asked to pivot its industrial bases to expensive green technologies. Experts estimate that it would require 5.6 trillion USD for the world to transition to net-zero (Reuters). The costs are rising every day. For example, the high interest rates and a lack of trust in the capital markets mean that a solar panel project in Southeast Asia can face up to four times the cost of a similar project in North America (AFID 2026). This financial asymmetry creates debt cycles where, when a developing nation wants to decarbonize, it is committed to paying high interest to fulfill the mandates of the international community.

The lack of technology transfer to developing nations serves to increase the decarbonization debt. Intellectual property for green technologies is concentrated in a few powerful economies. In 2026, the cost of licensing advanced battery or hydrogen electrolysis technology remained high for tech firms in Latin America or Southeast Asia (PPSTI, 2026). Without a waiver for green patents, these member economies are trapped into being consumers of expensive foreign technology rather than producers.

Adding to the crisis, many developing economies lack the fiscal flexibility to provide social safety nets necessary for workers fired from the phase-out of fossil fuels. For economies such as Papua New Guinea, an immature transition without funding risks mass unemployment and civil unrest. Entire regional livelihoods in these nations depend on traditional mining and coal power. Advanced economies can prioritize their own green agenda over global equity and subsidize their green industries. The debt translates beyond interest rates to the social sphere.

III. Deep Sea Mining:

Beyond land mining, the green transition has reached the sea because the land mines are facing depletion. Namely, the Clarion-Clipperton Zone (CCZ) in the Pacific has become a target for polymetallic nodules that contain cobalt, nickel, and manganese. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has permit rules that often allow advanced economies to mine and secure national production since they consistently lobby with the administration. However, Pacific Island Nations and indigenous communities have been very vocal against the process.

Indigenous peoples have the ocean as an ancestral heritage and a source of life rather than for resource extraction. These communities have warned the international organization that disturbing the seafloor can trigger catastrophic sediment plumes that would suffocate coral reefs and collapse fishing communities. Mining impacts the livelihood of many who need the ocean for sources of food and can violate the consent of indigenous people. With the discovery of dark oxygen, scientists have analyzed polymetallic nodules and confirmed that the minerals in the nodules are vital for the abyssal ecosystem. The removal process could permanently eliminate oxygen sources for deep-sea life (Nature).

On the other hand, seabed mining is much safer than landmining and provides a cleaner alternative. Marine biologists have also produced data that shows that the metal from the nodules contains significantly lower levels of toxic waste and are actively producing technologies that only mine with minimal contact. The procedures are becoming safer for commercial deployment, and science-based ocean management is better in the long run to understand the impacts of climate change on the oceans. The High Seas Treaty, a UN agreement to protect marine life in deep seabeds, has provided new legal frameworks to create specific zones protected from mining, and can be expanded with the help of APEC. Certain countries have exclusive economic zones (EEZs) where they can mine and create clear jurisdiction for future mining.

IV. Autonomizing the Grid:

Currently, green energy can be decentralized, but it can be used in microgrids in tiny regions. Roughly 3.4 million households in the Asia-Pacific region remain unelectrified in rural regions such as Myanmar (ADB, 2026). Traditional coal and gas plants require long-distance transmission lines that can be expensive but microgrid changes the reality. Decentralized renewable energy provides immediate energy access to power local industries and digital education. 80% of the global population lives in countries that have to import fossil fuels, leaving them vulnerable to price swings associated with geopolitical conflicts (UN 2026).

Renewable energy allows APEC economies to limit risk in their national budgets for energy and allows trade to remain independent of global instability. For instance, wind and solar power require virtually no water to generate electricity, so that more water can be used for drinking rather than cooling traditional power plants. For cities that experience frequent droughts or have limited access to fresh water, this benefits them and allows water to be saved for agriculture and human consumption. There are unique benefits to having solar power in agriculture. For instance, China currently uses solar projects that generate clean electricity and provide shade to reduce water evaporation in fishing ponds. This application is one of many ways green transition can complement food security. With more research and development, there will be new ways to further integrate renewable energy projects into different sectors so that clean energy can be collected.

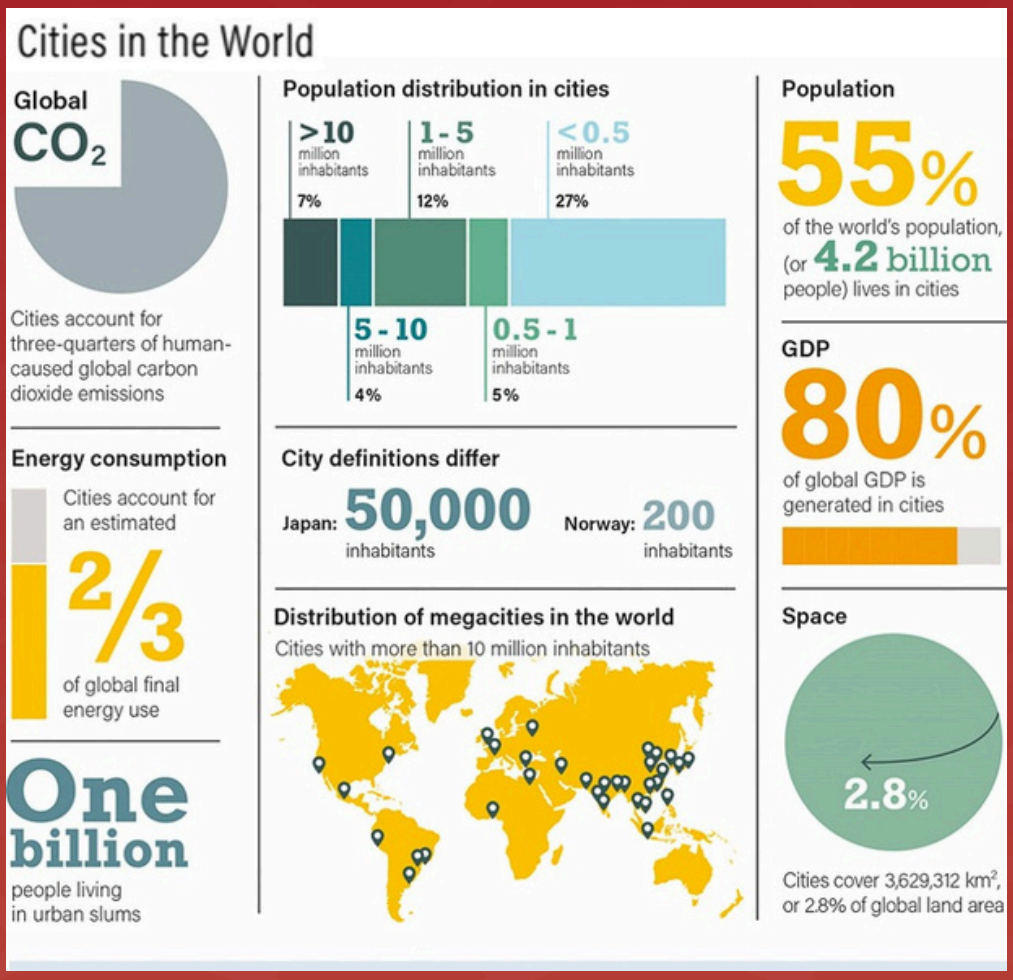

Figure 8: The infographic shows the population in cities that could use renewable energy sources or those impacted by large infrastructure projects (Ren21).

There are additional impacts to energy independence. When the grid becomes more autonomous, households can become equipped with solar panels and batteries to store that energy. In this way, they may choose to sell the generated energy to their neighbors or to the local microgrid during peak hours. This has the potential to create a peer-to-peer economy with energy trading that strengthens the energy stability in rural districts.

Traditional thermal power plants are among the largest industrial consumers of water and often compete with local municipalities during heatwaves. With the shift to solar and wind, which operate through photovoltaic or mechanical means, we can redirect billions of gallons of water toward sustaining local ecosystems and urban populations. This would additionally address the crisis with AI water consumption that tech firms are trying to solve right now.

APEC Commitments:

APEC seeks to honor its agenda and increase the connectivity of member economies to build prosperity. APEC wants to employ all of the mechanisms it has to promote the green transition. For example, the new 2026 agenda just activated the APEC Support Fund to promote digitalization for green transitions. The idea originated in China and wants to provide the financial means for developing economies to adopt smart technologies. The funds have been used for data optimizations for energy grids and electrifying public transportation. The First Senior Officials' Meeting in Guangzhou, China, looked at how renewable energy plants can be gradually integrated into the city grid.

Because APEC wants to double renewable shares, the region is doing everything in its power to stay ahead in the energy intensity reduction. APEC uses energy working groups to look at investment policies to look at how even tax credits can be used to build factories with solar panels. This type of industrial policy aims to standardize the industry and encourages more innovation for smart grids in cities. APEC acts like an incubator with its funds in order to increase market stability. Through the Committee on Trade and Investment (CTI), APEC wants to facilitate dialogue to prevent the artificial inflation of the green transition and focuses on opening trade to lower-cost green products.

APEC-based companies have signed onto the 2026 EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directives to address labor rights. With the directors, companies must report on the labor concerns happening within the supply chains, and victims of labor abuses can file civil liability claims directly against those companies. This marks a high-stakes legal obligation for the companies and a framework that APEC is beginning to explore. However, leaders in Indonesia and the Philippines do not necessarily agree with this tactic. For developing economies, leaders have argued that the strict human rights laws in the West can place an excessive burden on their economies, which can harm small businesses in the long run.

Debates never exist in a vacuum, and delegates are expected to combine reality with the potential of policymaking. The mission in this topic is to integrate energy and trade into the same conversation, as they impact each other in ways that are unconventional.

Questions to consider:

1. How do member economies engage with green energy now, and what should they change in the future?
2. If member economies cannot participate in green growth, will growth always be stagnant?
3. Are there implications of green technologies on artificial intelligence?
4. Should member economies abide by the new vision of renewable energies, or is this an individual state matter?
5. In what ways do international frameworks help developing countries for the green transition?
6. Should the world expect the green transition to occur within the next 10 years in accordance with the APEC green agenda?
7. Will developing countries see the economic benefits of this new green agenda in the long run or will the existing inequalities deepen?
8. What mechanisms are developing economies allowed to use to oppose green development when developed countries control the green tech market?

Additional Resources:

https://time.com/6094560/deep-sea-mining-environmental-costs-benefits

https://doi.org/10.1007/s40152-021-00233-2

https://www.forbes.com/sites/jamesconca/2022/02/11/seafloor-mining-for-rare-metals--a-brilliant-idea-or-another-environmental-catastrophe

https://www.cogitatiopress.com/oceanandsociety/article/view/8791

https://www.imf.org/-/media/Files/Publications/WP/2023/English/wpiea2023140-print-pdf.ashx

https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/can-democratic-republic-congos-mineral-resources-provide-pathway-peace

https://climate.mit.edu/ask-mit/what-clean-energy-any-kind-energy-completely-clean

https://iee.psu.edu/news/blog/transitioning-renewable-energy-challenges-and-opportunities

APEC

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

Yale Model United Nations China III

May 15-17, 2026