

March 2026

Volume 2, Issue 1



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From the Curator’s Desk

As 2026 begins, the Asia-Pacific region is undergoing rapid transformation driven by digitalization, evolving trade dynamics, and shifting workforce demands. The growing importance of digitally delivered services and emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, is reshaping economic opportunities—particularly for women’s participation. At the same time, these changes highlight the critical role of education, skills development, and inclusive policies in preparing individuals to thrive in an increasingly digital and interconnected economy. In this context, PECC remains committed to fostering informed dialogue, strengthening regional cooperation, and advancing practical solutions for inclusive and sustainable growth.

This issue features a finalized study led by Dr. Sherry Stephenson and Dr. Mia Mikic for the APEC Group on Services and the APEC Policy Partnership for Women and the Economy, supported by DFAT and executed by RMIT University. The research examines how greater participation in high-skill digitally delivered services (DDS) can empower women across APEC economies. Drawing on data, private-sector insights, and case studies, it highlights persistent barriers and opportunities, showing that inclusive policies, skills development, and access to capital and technology are essential for growth, competitiveness, and women’s full economic participation.

We also highlight *Educating the Next Generation for Asia-Pacific Cooperation*, a contribution from a former intern that underscores the central role of education in building regional understanding and cooperation. The piece calls on future leaders to leverage education to deepen regional knowledge, strengthen networks, and develop the intercultural capabilities needed to contribute effectively in an increasingly interconnected region.

Finally, this issue brings together updates from Member Committees, as well as insights and events to keep our community informed and engaged. We thank you for your continued engagement and invite your feedback and contributions for future editions of the PECC Link E-newsletter at media@pecc.org.

Sincerely,

PECC International Secretariat

AusPECC: Advisory Board

AusPECC establishes a new Advisory Board to strengthen regional engagement

The Australian Committee of the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (AusPECC) has appointed a new Advisory Board, bringing together internationally recognised experts from business, academia, government, and civil society to strengthen Australia’s contribution to regional economic cooperation.

The Advisory Board reflects a deliberate effort to bring together a diverse range of perspectives and expertise to AusPECC’s work. Its members include leading economists, trade and services experts, representatives from large and small businesses, business entrepreneurs, and experienced policy practitioners. Together, they represent a balanced cross-section of corporate, public policy, and academic expertise, reflecting the breadth of interests involved in Australia’s engagement with the Asia-Pacific.

Drawing on this diverse expertise, the Advisory Board will help guide AusPECC’s contributions to PECC, providing forward-looking and actionable ideas to advance market-driven economic integration in the spirit of open regionalism.

AusPECC Chair Arjuna Nadaraja welcomed the establishment of the Advisory Board, noting that its members bring *“a remarkable breadth of expertise and experience across priority areas of interest to both PECC and APEC, including in trade, investment, geopolitics, sustainability, indigenous affairs and regional economic policy.”* He added that the Board’s diverse perspectives will help ensure AusPECC continues to contribute high-quality policy thinking to support economic cooperation across the Asia-Pacific.

The Advisory Board will be chaired by Stuart Fuller, Chair of Asia Society Australia, and will help shape AusPECC’s work on a range of priority issues, including digitalisation and e-commerce, sustainability and inclusion, trade and structural reform, supply-chain resilience, services regulation, and regional economic collaboration toward the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific.

The Advisory Board members are:

- **Stuart Fuller (Chair)**, Chair, Asia Society Australia
- **Craig Emerson**, Executive Chair, Australian APEC Study Centre at RMIT
- **Christopher Findlay AM**, Honorary Professor, Crawford School of Public Policy
- **Christopher Langman**, Immediate Past Chair, AusPECC
- **Elizabeth Ward**, Australian Ambassador for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)
- **Grace Gown**, Head of Global Public Policy, Xero
- **Jane Drake-Brockman**, Senior Visiting Fellow, Institute for International Trade / Executive Director, Australian Services Roundtable
- **Jon Berry**, Geopolitics Lead, KPMG South ASPAC
- **Liandra Gaykamangu**, Founder & CEO, Liandra Swim
- **Prudence Gordon**, Founder & Executive Director, Australian Centre for International Trade and Investment (ACITI)
- **Shiro Armstrong**, Director, Australia-Japan Research Centre, ANU Crawford School of Public Policy
- **Sophia Hamblin Wang**, Co-founder & Chief Operating Officer, Mineral Carbon International

More information on the Advisory Board and AusPECC’s work is here:
<https://www.apec.org.au/about-auspecc>

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AusPECC: Personnel

Last month, Dr Timothy Lawler, Policy and Research Advisor at the Australian APEC Study Centre, joined the AusPECC Secretariat. He supports AusPECC's research and policy outputs, and management of AusPECC's collaborative programs with business, academic institutions, and policy makers including the FTAAP Signature Project. Tim is experienced as a staffer to the Australian ABAC Secretariat. He looks forward to deepening his understanding of AusPECC's work and contributing to PECC more broadly.



CNCPECC Updates

Building an Asia-Pacific Community to Prosper Together

2026 marks the third time that China hosts APEC. In the past decade, the Asia-Pacific has deepened regional cooperation and emerged as the engine of global economic growth, the champion of regional integration, and the vanguard of innovation-driven development. At the same time, the world has entered a new period of turbulence and transformation, and the challenges facing Asia-Pacific are mounting. Unilateralism and protectionism are on the rise, economic fragmentation is worsening, and regional economic integration is encountering strong headwinds.

Against this backdrop and to rekindle the spirit that started us on this journey, China has chosen the theme “**Building an Asia-Pacific Community to Prosper Together**” for this year and will focus on the three priorities of openness, innovation, cooperation. China will hold high the banner of building an Asia Pacific community, explore FTAAP and a network of connectivity as two key pathways, accelerate digital, smart and green transformation driven by innovation and deepen multifaceted cooperation. China will host about 300 meetings and events throughout this year.



As a champion of regional economic cooperation and a founding partner, PECC has an important role to play in supporting the APEC policy making process by providing intellectual input. In PECC Charter, the objective of PECC is to promote economic cooperation and the idea of a Pacific Community and to work towards its realization, which is perfectly echoed the theme of APEC 2026.

CNCPECC will host PECC 33rd General Meeting and Standing Committee Meeting on 16-17 May in Shanghai. This gathering will offer a unique opportunity for PECC members to provide intellectual input into this year’s APEC process and beyond. It will also serve as a valuable opportunity to observe China’s economic development and its economic policy orientation.

CTPECC Updates

The 40th Pacific Economic Community Seminar, titled “The Impact of Digital Economy Transformations on Global Trade,” was hosted by CTPECC on November 21, 2025, in Taipei. The event gathered academic experts and researchers to address the challenges of a “new normal” characterized by geopolitical instability, trade protectionism, and rapid technological shifts. The primary objective was to explore how regional cooperation, digital innovation, and institutional integration can enhance supply chain resilience and foster a more inclusive international trade environment.



Adapting to a New Normal Through Regional Cooperation

The first session highlighted a global trend toward protectionism and the weaponization of trade policies, which has led to significant economic uncertainty. Discussions emphasized the region’s heavy dependence on specific intermediate goods and the resulting vulnerability of domestic value chains to supply disruptions. To mitigate these risks, the session advocated for strengthening APEC collaboration and diversifying supply chains through frameworks like CPTPP and RCEP. Furthermore, experts noted that while AI reconstitutes economic activities, regional R&D partnerships and knowledge networks are essential for mid-sized economies to bridge the gap between advanced and developing nations.

Digital Transformation: Opportunities and Challenges

The second session focused on how digital technologies, particularly AI and cross-border e-commerce platforms, are reshaping global value chains and retail systems. The rise of direct-to-consumer models allows SMEs to bypass traditional distributors, though many still face challenges such as digital skill shortages and weak brand power. Innovation in logistics, such as predictive delivery and automated “last mile” solutions, is significantly driving trade efficiency. However, this rapid digitalization also necessitates a shift toward data-driven marketing and stricter adherence to evolving global regulations regarding data privacy and AI governance.

Conclusion and Policy Coordination

The seminar concluded by emphasizing that digital trade now serves as a primary driver of global GDP, necessitating the establishment of robust regional digital standards. As digital governance faces challenges like cybersecurity threats and fragmented regulations, comprehensive frameworks such as DEPA and the WTO’s Joint Statement Initiative are becoming vital for transparency. Participants agreed that economies must develop better tools to measure intangible digital exchanges and address tax loopholes used by multinational tech firms. Ultimately, regional collaboration and digital diplomacy remain the most effective paths for maintaining policy.

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USPECC-led PECC Signature Project—Roundtable event during APEC SOM 1

On February 6, USPECC convened a Roundtable on AI for Trade Facilitation on the margins of APEC Senior Officials’ Meeting I (SOM 1)—as part of the USPECC-led 2026 PECC Signature Project.

The Roundtable brought together private sector leaders, government officials, academics, and stakeholders working at the intersection of customs, trade, and AI to exchange ideas on how this rapidly evolving technology can reshape trade facilitation.

As economies across the region accelerate efforts to digitalize trade systems, APEC is uniquely positioned to help develop forward-looking frameworks that support the responsible uptake of AI—reducing barriers, boosting efficiency, and managing risks.



Across four sessions, participants emphasized several key insights:

- Cross-border data-sharing and data quality are foundational to effective AI systems
- Physical digital infrastructure, including fixed broadband is a necessary element
- Human-centric approaches – ensuring human in the loop decision-making, retraining/upskilling the workforce and maintaining existing expertise are essential to maintain stability and trust
- AI can support existing interoperability challenges by translating unstructured, unformatted data into usable information,
- Progress will depend on a broader AI services ecosystem, including infrastructure, standards, and talent

This Roundtable will help inform the next stage of drafting recommendations and best practices for APEC economies to harness AI in trade facilitation.

Virtual USPECC Committee Meeting with U.S. APEC Senior Official Casey Mace

USPECC organized a virtual meeting with U.S. APEC Senior Official Casey Mace on February 19. Committee members received a readout from SOM 1 and an overview of APEC China 2026 themes from Senior Official Mace. Following this brief, members exchanged questions and discussed potential areas of collaboration between USPECC and U.S. government agencies engaging in APEC workstreams.

FPTPEC Updates

In 2025, the French Pacific Territories PECC Committee (FPTPEC) consolidated its role as an active contributor to PECC’s agenda, with a particular focus on the governance of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and on emerging regional public goods. Building on work initiated at the 2024 PECC General Meeting in Lima and the San Francisco International Seminar, FPTPEC played a central part in the AI Action Summit held in Paris on 10–11 February 2025, where it presented the Asia Pacific AI Governance Accelerator (APAIGA), a coordination mechanism designed with United States Committee for Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (USPECC) to foster shared principles of precaution, ethics and responsibility in AI across APEC economies.

The project, showcased alongside partners from the United States, China, Singapore, Chinese Taipei, Peru and Korea, aims to feed concrete recommendations into APEC ministerial processes.

Throughout 2025, FPTPEC also worked to deepen the substance and reach of its activities in the AI field, including follow-up work in Singapore at the invitation of SINCPEC and the Singapore authorities.



Looking ahead, the committee will remain closely engaged in preparations for the PECC/APEC 2026 ministerial discussions on AI in Beijing and intends to contribute to initiatives such as “AI for Trade Facilitation”, led by USPECC, which could help position digital governance and trusted data flows at the heart of Asia-Pacific economic cooperation. These efforts underline FPTPEC’s ambition to ensure that France and its Pacific territories bring a distinctive voice and

expertise to debates on the responsible use of AI in the region.

Beyond AI, FPTPEC is preparing to relaunch a major International PECC Seminar on “Food Security in the Asia-Pacific”, scheduled for 30 October 2026. Organized in partnership with Vietnam National Committee for Pacific Economic Cooperation (VNCPEC), CIRAD, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and with the involvement of the Asian Development Bank and several Asian and Latin American economies, the seminar will examine how regional cooperation can address structural vulnerabilities in food systems. The additional lead time has made it possible to broaden the partnership base, and a revised concept note will be submitted to the PECC International Secretariat in spring 2026.

At the same time, the FPTPEC Secretariat, in collaboration with the New Caledonia section, is exploring the possibility of setting new dates for the seminar titled ‘Access to Critical Materials’ and including ‘new energies’ within a broader scope, in cooperation with Canadian National Committee for Pacific Economic Cooperation (CANCPEC) and Australian Pacific Economic Cooperation Committee (AusPECC). The seminar is slated to take place at the end of 2026. Constituting a significant interest for Pacific Islands territories and remotes areas, the FPTPEC will continue to participate in PECC signature projects, including the *State of the Region*, FTAAP projects and with new IA projects.

Finally, the FPTPEC also aims at reaffirming the benefits from an open transpacific dialogue by exploring the possibility to launch a webinar series. Organized on a trimestral or quarterly basis, they would focus on trade related issues, investment facilitation in support to the work initiated on food security, strategic materials, new energies, and with IA. In cooperation with think-tanks, business, and multilateral organizations, these webinars would contribute to a beneficial and open dialogue between all PECC economies on topics of mutual interest.



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ClimateTech in Focus

Artificial Intelligence for Sustainability



Artificial intelligence is no longer a standalone technological breakthrough—it is becoming embedded across the systems that power our economies. From energy grids and critical infrastructure to manufacturing, logistics, finance, certification, education, and public governance, AI is reshaping how decisions are made and how resources are allocated.

This report explores how AI is transforming climate mitigation and adaptation in real-world settings. It looks beyond technical capability to examine what it actually takes to translate innovation into scalable sustainability outcomes. At its core, AI’s value lies in its ability to reduce uncertainty, improve decision quality, and help align complex systems operating under real-world constraints.

Yet rapid advances in AI capability do not automatically translate into climate impact. In practice, deployment often encounters institutional, operational, and governance bottlenecks. Moving from pilot projects to system-wide change requires more than algorithms—it demands clear data governance frameworks, regulatory certainty, operational readiness, skilled talent, and trust between innovators, regulators, and adopters.

Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives, the report outlines the enabling conditions for large-scale impact. It emphasizes cross-border cooperation, public-sector leadership, and inclusive innovation models that ensure AI can support sustainable development—not only in advanced economies, but also in emerging and resource-constrained contexts.

[Click here to download the report](#)

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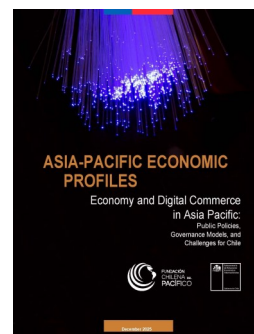
Economy & Digital Commerce in Asia-Pacific

This report analyzes the key trends shaping digital commerce across the Asia-Pacific region, with particular focus on Australia, China, the Republic of Korea, and Singapore. Its objective is to generate policy-relevant insights for Chile by examining how these economies have advanced digital transformation and e-commerce in practice.

The analysis identifies public policy approaches that have effectively supported growth in digital markets, with close attention to regulatory design, incentive structures, and instruments for innovation and capacity building. It evaluates not only what policies were adopted, but how institutional coordination, regulatory clarity, and strategic sequencing enabled their implementation.

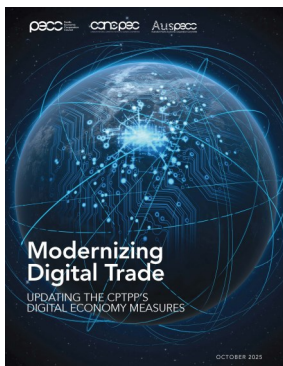
At the regional level, the report also examines the institutional and regulatory frameworks that underpin the expansion of digital commerce and digital trade integration. By combining comparative evidence with analytical assessment, it provides concrete inputs to inform future strategy development and to support policy discussions on Chile’s deeper integration into regional and global digital trade ecosystems.

[Click here to download the report](#)



Modernizing Digital Trade

Keeping CPTPP Digital Trade Rules Fit for the AI Era



When the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) entered into force in 2018, its Chapter 14 on Electronic Commerce was widely viewed as one of the most advanced digital trade frameworks in any trade agreement. Provisions supporting cross-border data flows and limiting data localization helped position the CPTPP as a benchmark for modern digital trade rules.

Since then, however, the digital economy has evolved rapidly. Advances in artificial intelligence (AI), the expansion of data-driven business models, and shifting geopolitical dynamics have transformed the nature of digital trade. Today, digital activity spans every sector—from goods embedded with digital services to the global exchange of data and algorithms—creating both new opportunities and new regulatory challenges.

In response to these developments, the Canadian National Committee for Pacific Economic Cooperation (CANPECC) and the Australian Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (AusPECC), under the auspices of the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC), have produced a new report aimed at supporting the ongoing General Review of the CPTPP. Developed through a Track 1.5 process involving 25 experts from 11 PECC economies, the report was submitted to the CPTPP Commission at its meeting in Melbourne in November 2025.

The report outlines 13 recommendations to help ensure that Chapter 14 remains relevant in a rapidly changing digital landscape. These focus on key areas including responsible AI governance, maintaining trusted cross-border data flows, strengthening cybersecurity and digital trust, improving inclusion for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), and enhancing regulatory cooperation among CPTPP members.

Taken together, the recommendations aim to reinforce the CPTPP's role as a “gold-standard” framework for digital trade—one capable of supporting open, trusted, and resilient digital economies across the Asia-Pacific in the years ahead.

[Click here to download the report](#)

[PECC Secretariat > Mission Statement](#)

PECC Mission Statement

At its Standing Committee meeting in August 2025, the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC) endorsed the Mission Statement, reaffirming the Council's role in advancing regional cooperation in the region.

The Mission Statement

“Actively support economic cooperation and sustainable growth for an open and stable Pacific Community by leveraging tripartite collaboration and expertise to deliver evidence-based research insights, fostering inclusive and effective dialogues, and proactively providing forward-looking and actionable solutions.”

The Statement underscores the PECC's tripartite nature (business, government, and academic/thinktank experts) as a vital mechanism for generating research-based policy insights and meaningful dialogue. It also reflects PECC's commitment to playing an even more proactive role in advancing regional economic cooperation, in line with the APEC Putrajaya Vision 2040 of “an open, dynamic, resilient, and peaceful Asia-Pacific community”.

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Amplifying Insights: One-Minute Soundbites from the State of the Region 2025



In an increasingly digital information environment, concise and accessible communication has become essential for engaging broader audiences. As part of our outreach strategy, we recently launched a short-form audio initiative on the SoundCloud platform, featuring five one-minute soundbite recordings derived from the key findings of the *State of the Report 2025*.

Released weekly across our social media platforms, each recording highlights one of the top five major risks to regional economic growth identified in the report. The aim is simple: synthesize insights from our survey results into accessible takeaways that reach our stakeholders in a format suited to today's fast-paced digital landscape.

The five soundbites focus on the report's most pressing growth risks, providing a quick snapshot of the challenges shaping the regional outlook. By presenting these insights in short audio segments, we hope to encourage audiences to engage with the broader analysis contained in the full report while creating more opportunities for dialogue around the issues that matter most to the region.

This initiative also reflects our broader effort to experiment with and adopt new digital engagement approaches that enhance both the reach and accessibility of our work. In addition to the audio series, we are actively exploring the use of artificial intelligence tools to strengthen the visual presentation of our content. This includes the potential development of AI-generated videos and dynamic visual assets to complement our social media outreach, providing more immersive ways of communicating key messages.

By integrating these emerging technologies into our communications strategy, we aim to present insights from our survey results and analytical work in formats that are not only informative but also engaging and easily understood. Visual storytelling, supported by AI, offers opportunities to simplify complex information, highlights key findings more effectively, and caters to audiences with diverse content preferences. At the same time, we are mindful of maintaining accuracy, clarity, and consistency across all outputs. As we continue to test and refine these tools, our focus remains on ensuring that innovation is guided by purpose—enhancing the quality of communication while making our content more accessible to a broader and increasingly diverse audience.

Early indicators are encouraging. To date, the soundbite series has generated measurable engagement across our social media channels and contributed to increased traffic to our website during the posting periods. Notably, additional reach has been achieved through member committees actively reposting and amplifying the content on their own social media platforms, further driving audience engagement and visibility. This collective effort has played a meaningful role in extending the initiative's impact beyond our primary channels. Overall, these results suggest that short, targeted digital content can serve as an effective complement to more in-depth publications, helping to broaden outreach while reinforcing key messages from our longer-form articles.

Looking ahead, we will continue refining and expanding these approaches by leveraging data-driven insights, digital tools, and creative content formats to enhance the reach and impact of our work. This includes experimenting with new platforms, optimizing content based on audience engagement patterns, and tailoring messages to better resonate with diverse segments of our audience. Through these ongoing efforts, we seek not only to broaden our visibility but also to foster deeper, more sustained engagement with our growing online community, ensuring that our outputs remain relevant, accessible, and impactful.

[Download soundbites here](#)

Alumni Insights

Educating the Next Generation for Asia-Pacific Cooperation

The future of regional cooperation begins in education. Long before they became diplomats, entrepreneurs, or professors, young leaders are making an impact in their classrooms and communities.

Education matters very deeply for Asia-Pacific cooperation because it helps us understand the region. The Asia-Pacific is extraordinarily diverse, bringing together many cultures, languages, political systems, and economic models. To engage meaningfully with this region requires more than goodwill. We need knowledge, curiosity, and the ability to understand differences in a constructive way. Education allows students to develop business knowledge, cultural awareness, and a better understanding of how institutions work. This kind of human capital is essential not only for individual careers, but also for the present and future of regional integration.

Over the past ten years, I have had the privilege of working as a professor at a business school in Colombia, after having had student experiences on both sides of the Pacific, in Colombia and Singapore, as well as professional experiences in Singapore and South Korea. Those experiences have shaped the way I understand the region and the role education can play in connecting people across it.

One of the things that makes me proudest of my work is seeing what happens after students graduate. Many of my former students have gone on to connect with the Asia-Pacific ecosystem in different ways. Some have pursued careers as diplomats or in public service. Others have launched entrepreneurial ventures doing business with Asia-Pacific markets. Many have sought further educational opportunities in the region through graduate studies, internships, and other forms of experiential learning that allow them not only to study the region, but to live it.

As students, we need to understand that the Asia-Pacific is a region of business opportunities, but also a region where countries share important challenges that make cooperation necessary. Economic integration is not only about trade and investment. It is also about working together on common issues and preparing leaders who can move across cultures, sectors, and institutional environments.

That is why my invitation to students is to develop intercultural competence and to seek exposure to the region through internships, study opportunities, exchanges, and mobility experiences. The opportunity to truly interact with the Asia-Pacific beyond one's own country makes all the difference. Education should not be limited to the classroom. Students should use this stage of their lives to build knowledge, relationships, and practical experience. Building networks with professors and mentors, participating in student organizations, taking part in case competitions, and seeking professional exposure are all part of becoming a future leader.

This matters even more in a global context marked by uncertainty. Political tensions, economic volatility, and geopolitical shifts continue to affect international relations. Yet business, investment, and cooperation continue across the Asia-Pacific. One important reason is that, beyond formal politics, strong connections have been built among people, institutions, and organizations. People-to-people connectivity remains one of the foundations that keeps economic cooperation moving forward.

PECC has an important role to play in this process. It is not only an organization that connects the region through dialogue and cooperation. It also creates opportunities for younger generations through internships, youth forums, and platforms where students and young professionals can participate in the regional conversation. These experiences can be truly transformative because they show that meaningful contributions to Asia-Pacific cooperation can begin early in our careers.

My message to you, future Asia-Pacific leaders, is simple: take your education seriously. Use it to understand the region, to build networks, to develop intercultural competence, and to prepare yourself to contribute from whatever role you choose in the future. For the next generation of leaders, the task is to strengthen those connections across the Pacific and help build a more prosperous future for the region.

Camilo Pérez-Restrepo
Email: cperezr1@eafit.edu.co
Colombia

**Mr Camilo Alberto Perez Restrepo, a former student in the Master Program of the Singapore Lee Kuan Yew Of Public Policy, participated in the PECC internship program during the summer in 2013 (May to July 2013).*

INTERNSHIP

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Enhancing Women’s Economic Empowerment in APEC through Greater Participation in High-skill DDS

Two researchers from the PECC – Dr. Sherry Stephenson and Dr. Mia Mikic – led a recently finalized study for the APEC Group on Services and the APEC Policy Partnership for Women and the Economy on *Enhancing Women’s Economic Empowerment in APEC through Greater Participation in High-skill Digitally Delivered Services (DDS)*. This study was supported by the Australian Government, through its Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and executed by the Australia APEC Centre at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) University. The work builds upon the La Serena Roadmap for Women and Inclusive Growth, adopted by APEC Ministers in 2019, can be accessed [here](#).

This in-depth three-part study examined quantitative evidence, private-sector perspectives, and firm-level case studies to understand how digitalization—and especially trade in **digitally delivered services (DDS)**—is reshaping women’s economic participation across APEC economies. Together, the findings underscore both the **scale of the opportunity** and the **depth of the remaining barriers** to women’s full participation and leadership in high skill, digitally intensive services sectors.

The study highlights a simple but often overlooked reality: the fastest-growing segments of services trade — ICT, financial, and professional services — are also those in which women remain systematically underrepresented. This underlines the reality that closing the existing gender gap in digitally delivered services (DDS) is both an economic and strategic necessity. Women remain under-represented in these dynamic service sectors and continue to face systemic barriers, including unequal access to STEM education along with persistent biases in finance, workplace culture, and AI development. Across APEC economies, women continue to face interconnected barriers in:

- digital and technical skills acquisition
- STEM education pathways
- access to growth capital
- regulatory and compliance environment
- career progression into leadership roles
- AI design and deployment ecosystems

The underutilisation of women in these economic roles costs APEC economies an estimated USD 17 trillion in lost output annually, while full gender equality remains decades away. Yet, evidence from fifteen women-led startups across eleven economies produced from case study research confirms that when women gain equal access to technology, capital, and supportive ecosystems, they build globally competitive and socially impactful enterprises.

The policy message is straightforward: **improving women’s participation in DDS is not primarily a social agenda — it is a productivity, competitiveness, and growth agenda.**

The study proposes practical policy steps for economies, governments and institutions, including:

- targeted digital-skills and reskilling strategies
- stronger STEM pipelines for women
- family-compatible labor market frameworks
- financing models suitable for women-led firms
- reduction of regulatory frictions affecting digital trade
- leadership and advancement mechanisms
- bias-aware AI governance approaches
- collection of improved sex-disaggregated data

For those interested, the following resources are available for your reference:

- [The full study](#)
- [A presentation highlighting the study’s key results and recommendations](#)

As part of the project, APEC has launched a dedicated [knowledge hub on women and services trade](#), which brings together all of the work that has been done to trade under this project on women and trade in services.

The researchers are grateful to the many experts, policymakers in the PECC and APEC region who provided insights for this work, and especially to the women founders of digitally intensive services firms across APEC who enthusiastically shared their experience in this area.

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The work of advancing economic understanding and cooperation across the Asia-Pacific region is built on collaboration. Each month, we are inspired by the researchers, policymakers, educators, and practitioners who contribute their insights and energy to our network.

Whether you are analyzing regional trade patterns, exploring sustainable growth strategies, or mentoring the next generation of economists, your work helps shape a more resilient and inclusive economic future for our region.

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PECC 33rd General Meeting
16 May | Shanghai, China

PECC Standing Committee Meeting
17 May | Shanghai, China

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It operates as an independent, non-governmental forum, aiming to promote economic growth, social progress, and regional stability through cooperation in areas such as trade, investment, and finance.



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