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BUILDING AN ASIA-PACIFIC COMMUNITY TO PROSPER TOGETHER: THE APEC 2026 STRATEGIC BRIEFING

The theme for 2026, “Building an Asia-Pacific Community to Prosper Together,” is a strategic mandate to steer the 21 member economies toward the principles of open regionalism. At the First Senior Officials’ Meeting (SOM) in Guangzhou, representatives emphasized that unity is essential in responding to current global headwinds. By championing the “APEC way”—a diplomatic framework that prioritizes consensus through consultation—the 2026 host year seeks to provide the predictability and policy coordination needed for regional market confidence amid unprecedented change.

The mandate for “Openness” serves as the primary pillar, recognizing that trade liberalization remains central to Asia-Pacific prosperity. Over recent decades, this commitment has reduced average tariffs from 17 percent to 5 percent, yet rising protectionism necessitates renewed support for the multilateral trading system. The hosting country has called for safeguarding the WTO-centered framework as the foundation for a stable economic environment. The 2026 agenda also leverages the 20th anniversary of the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) concept to advance regional integration. The pursuit of FTAAP aims to create a unified multilateral standard and counter anti-globalization trends. For the private sector, this focus on trade digitalization and supply chain resilience supports the continued flow of goods and capital.

Innovation stands as the second engine of growth. The 2026 cycle prioritizes cooperation on frontier technologies, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the digital economy. The strategic objective is to promote interoperability of digital standards and expand public services across borders. By focusing on AI capacity building and digital infrastructure, APEC 2026 seeks to ensure that innovation-driven growth delivers equitable benefits and helps narrow the developmental gap.

The third pillar, Cooperation, is based on a “people first” philosophy that interweaves economic development with social and environmental integrity. A comprehensive agenda has been outlined at SOM 1 to address structural reforms needed to sustain growth amid demographic change, including the challenges of population aging for labor markets and fiscal policy. The 2026 work plan also covers food security, energy transition, and the participation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and women in the economy. By scaling up support for developing economies, APEC 2026 aims to strengthen regional resilience and ensure that the benefits of development are broadly shared.

Building on these priorities, the road ahead for APEC 2026 includes high-level technical and ministerial clusters in Shanghai and Dalian, culminating in the Economic Leaders’ Week in Shenzhen. A pivotal milestone will be the first five-year review of the Aotearoa Plan of Action, allowing member economies to recalibrate their trajectories toward the 2040 vision. This review provides an opportunity to measure progress in building an Asia-Pacific community that is open, dynamic, resilient, and peaceful.



PRIORITIES FOR APEC 2026

OPENNESS

- Advancing the FTAAP Agenda
- Supporting the Multilateral Trading System
- Digitalizing Trade
- Enhancing Connectivity

INNOVATION

- Leveraging Emerging Technologies
- Hosting APEC Digital Week Events
- Executing the new APEC Internet and Digital Economy Roadmap (AIDER, 2026-2031)

COOPERATION

- Hosting targeted ministerial dialogues across several key sectors, including: WEF, TMM, FSMM, SMEEM, EMM, TPTMM, HRDMM, FMM
- Enhancing ECOTECH

