



APEC 2021
**VOICES of
the FUTURE**
New Zealand

YOUTH DECLARATION 2021

APEC Youth Declaration 2021

Join, Work, Grow. Together.

Haumi ē, Hui ē, Tāiki ē.

November 2021 | New Zealand

Introduction

We, the youth representatives of 21 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) member economies, assembled virtually across the Asia-Pacific region through New Zealand's hosting of APEC 2021.

Due to the disruptions of the global pandemic, APEC 2021 was held by video conferencing. A total of 124 youth delegates collaborated to create a collective voice for young people across the APEC region. The following declaration has been reached by consensus by the youth delegates from the economies of:

Australia; Brunei Darussalam; Canada; Chile; People's Republic of China; Hong Kong, China; Indonesia; Japan; Republic of Korea; Malaysia; Mexico; New Zealand; Papua New Guinea; Peru; The Philippines; The Russian Federation; Singapore; Chinese Taipei; Thailand; United States of America; and Viet Nam.

As an incubator of ideas, APEC enables its member economies to work collaboratively towards a sustainable prosperity for the future together. Approximately one third of the APEC region's population are young people; it is the voices of our generation demanding accountability from the leaders of today.

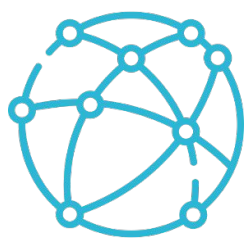
A Call to Action

Young people across the APEC region, working alongside other generations, have the vision to ensure a cooperative, green, and digital future for all. We have the dominant stake in the future we are creating now, and call for the following, to ensure youth impact is tangible.

We request that:

- This and future declarations be handed to the APEC Chair at the beginning of the year so that it can inform and shape conversations.
- A youth statement is embedded into the overarching action plan to ensure that APEC's outputs are informed and egalitarian.
- A report is provided to APEC Voices of the Future (VoF) with an update on the steps taken to implement the ideas of the youth declaration into APEC's action plan.
- APEC establishes an ongoing community for VoF alumni to support the continued exchange and implementation of ideas between young people and policymakers to ensure a youth perspective is heard on these critical issues.

The VoF delegates closely considered the APEC 2021 themes, and strongly recommend the following to APEC leaders:



International Cooperation to Combat COVID-19

We recommend APEC leaders focus on:

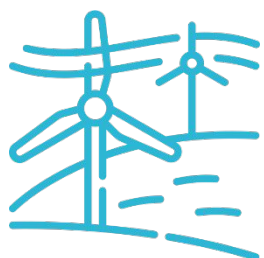
- Building resilience against future diseases
- Ensuring equal access to vital medical resources
- Working together to support the recovery from COVID-19.



A Digital Future

We recommend APEC Leaders focus on:

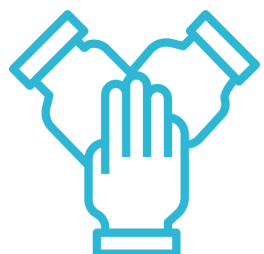
- Greater digital connectivity and accessibility
- Investing in digital education
- Cybersecurity and combatting disinformation
- Prioritising cyber wellness and positive social media use.



A Greener Future

We recommend APEC Leaders focus on:

- A green and blue plan
- Climate resilience, sustainable practices, and youth involvement
- Environmental laws and policies
- Research and development

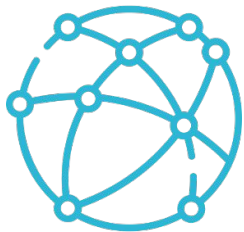


A Future for All

We recommend APEC Leaders focus on:

- 'Measuring what matters' to better inform APEC's conversation and work
- Focusing on suitable and quality education for everyone
- Embracing and prioritising marginalised people.

International Cooperation to Combat COVID-19



The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented levels of uncertainty, risks, and costs for economies around the world. It continues to claim millions of lives and is having devastating impacts on people, businesses, and economies. We believe the following points are crucial in responding to COVID-19 and preparing the region for future pandemics.

Building resilience against future diseases

Building resilience and capacity to withstand the current and future pandemics is essential to the sustainability, stability, and interests of people in APEC economies and beyond. APEC economies should:

- allocate fixed percentages of national GDP to create an APEC emergency common fund that would provide financial support to member states during future pandemics;
- invest in developing a common set of pandemic protocols that recognise intercultural differences, the needs of individual economies, and the balance between individual liberty and collective interests;
- work with non-governmental organisations to develop and maintain ‘resilience infrastructure’ so that ordinary economic activities can continue when lockdowns, mandatory quarantine, travel restrictions, and other similarly drastic policies are required; and
- build resilience in education systems by leveraging modern technology, enhancing public health education, and using new methods and initiatives to improve access to education, especially during future crises.

Ensuring equal access to vital medical resources

The gross inequalities, particularly in regard to income levels, in accessing minimal health protections and security guarantees are morally and practically unacceptable. APEC economies should:

- work systematically and coordinatively on securing collective partnership agreements with pharmaceutical companies;
- coordinate and distribute vaccines amongst member states by establishing a supplementary organ to COVAX; creating the equivalent APEC-VAX. APEC-VAX could ensure accurate and expedient delivery to the most affected populations and help national public health policy makers navigate complex economic and political relationships; and
- seek an expansion of Article 3 of the World Trade Organization’s GATT 1994 to curtail trade-discriminatory actions in vaccine production so that low-income and middle-income economies can trade fairly and have the means to contribute to medical research and innovation in the region.

Working together to support the recovery from COVID-19

APEC members should work together to support the people and sectors hardest hit by the pandemic both from an economic and wider wellbeing perspective. We recommend APEC economies:

- provide support to other member economies’ essential sectors, particularly the medical sector, that have been heavily impacted and need funding, especially in low and middle income economies. This could be done by collaborating with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to establish specialised accounts to provide targeted economic support;
- improve people’s ability to support themselves by cooperating between economies so that APEC labour markets are more dynamic, safer, fairer, sustainable, and more resilient by:
 - innovating employment services and methods;
 - conducting frequent social dialogues;
 - strengthening employment and social protection systems;
 - supporting the transitions to the digital economy, promoting diversity and inclusivity; and
 - endorsing and promoting skill-development opportunities; and
- address the wider wellbeing and mental health issues impacting society by raising awareness and implementing meaningful and effective policy measures, and supporting employers to establish mental wellbeing frameworks for their employees.

A Digital Future



Technology is a powerful tool to achieve economic growth, advance social outcomes, and strengthen cultural exchanges and cooperation. However, as COVID-19 accelerates digital transformation, we see the exacerbation of digital inequalities, job disruption, the spread of disinformation, and threats to cyber wellbeing. There has never been a more important time for APEC economies to take action to enable a more inclusive and resilient digital future.

Digital connectivity and accessibility

We recognise that digital connectivity is central to our COVID-19 recovery and the youths' resilience in the digital future. To ensure quality education and productive employment for youth, we call for increased digital connectivity through overcoming coverage and affordability barriers. We encourage APEC leaders to:

- strengthen international cooperation to exchange best practices to build and maintain resilient connectivity infrastructure for all, taking into account the geographical and cultural differences of each economy; and
- promote public and private sector cooperation by inviting telecommunication companies to partner up with economies to provide infrastructure for rural communities and low income urban populations.

Investing in digital education

Whilst youth are often considered the most digitally literate population, many lack the required skills to join the growing and advanced digital workforce. To achieve a productive and creative digital future, providing access to quality education to increase digital literacy among youth must be a priority for all APEC economies. We urge APEC leaders to:

- promote private investment in educational material and hardware infrastructure to run digital literacy programmes by giving incentives to companies such as tax reductions; and
- implement public-funded capacity-building programmes at all levels of education to increase female representation in Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM) and entrepreneurship to promote innovation.

Cybersecurity and combatting disinformation

We must create ways to establish security and integrity in the flow of information from mainstream media and social media. While rules are needed in the digital world, freedom of speech must be protected from potential encroachment of censorship. We call on APEC leaders to:

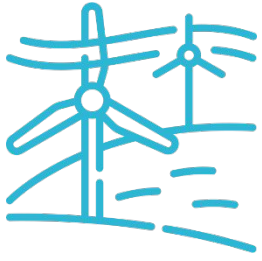
- enforce digital responsibilities and rules through establishing independent fact-checkers to ensure data integrity in the flow of information;
- hold tech companies accountable in protecting our data and privacy and require that they have a comprehensive framework to decipher between censorship and freedom of speech; and
- enact comprehensive data and privacy protection laws, and create a regulatory environment that minimises these harmful impacts of technology.

Prioritising cyber wellness and positive social media use

Whilst we recognise that social media has many benefits, it also presents a threat to the wellbeing of young people. It is important to understand the limits of technology and that behind a screen, a human's touch created such ingenuity. We must not allow technology to replace what only humans can do. We urge APEC leaders to:

- encourage tech companies to collaborate with organisations, non-for-profits, and advocacy groups to address growing internet addictions, both regionally and internationally, by promoting safer social media usage and offline human interaction and activity. This includes collaboration for mental wellness and initiatives such as anti-harassment and online bullying; and
- develop corporate social responsibility standards for companies to ensure harmful trends are monitored, and their motives and purpose are transparent and aligned for a positive digital future. Tech companies must understand they are dealing with human lives, not just product consumers.

A Greener Future



Right now, we stand at a critical moment in time: a Climate Emergency. We must be bold in the face of the climate crisis, as our collective home is at stake in this crucial moment: natural disasters, lack of waste management, and extreme rise of temperatures are some of the impacts we are seeing here and now. We deem the following points are essential if APEC economies want to build a greener future for everyone.

Green and blue plan

We urge APEC leaders to avoid subsidies and investments in fossil-fuel industries since they have a profound impact on our terrestrial and marine ecosystems. Thus, we need to adopt a circular economy system to decrease pollution and waste, as well as promote a green and blue transition and development. We call on APEC leaders to:

- present more ambitious and realistic Nationally Determined Contributions that fulfil the targets set in the Paris Agreement (2015), in order to be carbon-neutral by 2040;
- enhance green investments in renewable energy, low-emission transport, biofuels and create a financial system that advocates sustainable companies with ecological initiatives; and
- promote the “3R’s” of waste management initiatives and programmes, i.e. reduce, reuse, recycle.

Climate resilience, sustainable practices, and youth involvement

While our disadvantaged communities across the APEC region including ethnic minorities, women, youth, disabled peoples, and indigenous peoples, are feeling the impacts of climate change disproportionately, they also hold the perspectives and solutions needed. APEC economies must work in partnership with these communities to ensure our solutions create an accessible and inclusive future of climate justice for all. Elevating indigenous leadership and wisdom is vital to success in this arena. We call on APEC leaders to:

- educate and incorporate sustainable practices amongst the youth, enhancing knowledge and innovation on waste management, climate adaptation and resilience;
- focus on a gradual transition to renewable energy and make it more affordable, by considering a context-sensitive approach for each economy;
- create more opportunities to facilitate knowledge exchange on climate resiliency and sustainability; and
- tangibly recognise the value of indigenous knowledge and solutions, through both active partnership and resourcing.

Environmental laws and policies

We are in the midst of a human induced climate emergency. Consequently, we strongly believe that it is central that APEC economies develop more forceful environmental laws and policies that look upon our current ecological crisis. We urge APEC leaders to:

- enhance a sustainable economic and ecological recovery amidst the COVID-19 crisis, by implementing a regional Climate Change Strategy and Framework;
- develop universal standards for carbon emission taxes with views to cease the detriment of the planet, incentivising businesses to reduce their carbon emission, and encouraging cooperation between the private and public sectors;
- create new climate resilience and adaptation funds and policies in order to tackle a climate change worst-case scenario.

Research and development

With science constantly growing and changing, research and development is crucial to develop sustainability. An increase of innovation investment will allow us to shift away from unsustainable materials such as plastics and fossil fuels. We urge APEC leaders to:

- research on carbon capture technology; and
- establish an effective monitoring system to ensure collective accountability and measure Environmental Social Governance progress through a combination of qualitative and statistical indicators to meet specific climate action targets, on an annual basis.

A Future For All



Working collectively towards a sustainable future for all is key to creating a more empowered world. We recognise the youth statements of the past, the youth gathered today, and the one trillion young people who will follow us in the next fifty-thousand years. We issue you the following challenges to make a 'Future for All' a reality.

'Measuring what matters' into APEC's conversation and work

Expanding the focus beyond economic development will be positive to our future. As we traverse issues relating to social and environmental wellbeing, these layers that are inextricably linked, encompass one another, and when in balance, can help to enhance each other. For APEC to better reflect this, we urge leaders to:

- measure what matters, centering the desired outcomes of socio-economic wellbeing by establishing an APEC index for equitable and sustainable development;
- encouraging economies to adopt this model for inclusion and economic prosperity; and
- recognise and include more humanistic and holistic measures of economic development (i.e, New Zealand's Māori economy and Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Index).

Focusing on suitable, quality education for everyone

There is a need to further develop education standards, shaped by the voices of our youth, migrant and indigenous communities to build socially and culturally responsive education models of the future. We see the education of young people being key to APEC's continued social cohesion. To make this a reality, we call on APEC leaders to:

- invest in the skills and knowledge of women, indigenous people, linguistically diverse people, and other socially disadvantaged groups and ensure security through education and the transfer of knowledge across generations;
- set targets to ensure marginalised groups and communities are prioritised within education, upskilling, and development;
- push business to sponsor more affordable forms of international study and invest in cosmopolitan cities to the benefit of industry; and
- prioritise quality education to develop employability skills and resilience. Without transformation in our education system, massive digitalisation and COVID crisis will impose great risk for youth employability in the future.

Embracing and prioritising marginalised people

A significant shift in mindsets, policies, and actions is necessary to ensure inclusivity and opportunities to all in society. To achieve this, we urge APEC leaders to:

- reinforce women's rights in Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SME);
- recognise that empowered women are key to a resilient world amidst the raging COVID-19 pandemic;
- promote equal participation and opportunities for marginalised people in civil society to ensure inclusive decision-making;
- provide tax incentives for companies who facilitate disability-friendly infrastructure in workplaces; and
- recognise digitalisation as a consequential aspect in connecting businesses owned by women and indigenous people.

Conclusion

We, the Voices of the Future 2021 delegates, call upon APEC leaders to recognise the strength and unity of this declaration, as it holds within it the voices and visions of our future. We call upon APEC leaders to embrace the energy and ideas we as collective young people bring. We want to ensure we are charting a path **together** to a better future, creating a new **reality** we can feel proud to pass on.

Right now, we are at a crucial junction. We are in the midst of many challenges, also bringing a rising tide of opportunity to build resilience, to enhance equitable outcomes and access to education, to value and develop connectivity, to centre sustainability, and to cast a lens of collective wellbeing of our environment, society, and future generations.

Here, in this Declaration, we have been bold. Now, we call upon our APEC Leaders to do the same.



Australia



Brunei Darussalam



Canada



Chile



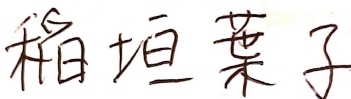
People's Republic of China



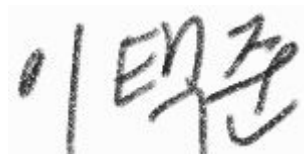
Hong Kong, China



Indonesia



Japan



Republic of Korea



Malaysia



Mexico



New Zealand



Papua New Guinea



Peru



Philippines



Russia



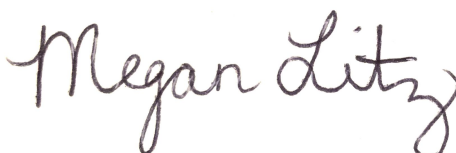
Singapore



Chinese Taipei



Thailand



United States of America



Viet Nam