**Digital transformation and regional cooperation in the Pacific**

# Side Event: 80th session of the Commission

# *24 April, 12:45-14:00 GMT+7*

# *Asia-Pacific Foyer, United Nations Conference Centre*

# Organizer(s)

Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), Pacific Community (SPC) and United Nations ESCAP Subregional Office for the Pacific

# Co-organizer(s)

Governments of Fiji and Papua New Guinea

# Registration

To attend the side event, all registrants must also register on Indico to attend the 80th Session by April 12 using the link here: <https://indico.un.org/event/1007591/>

Please register using the option “Registration for Others (Side events, Exhibition, etc.)” Those who do not register on Indico will not be able to access the United Nations Conference Center.

# Background

The eightieth session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) will be held from 22 to 26 April 2024 at the United Nations Conference Centre in Bangkok, under the theme “*Leveraging digital innovation for sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific*”. It provides an opportunity to strengthen region-wide cooperative action on leveraging digital innovation for the accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In the Pacific, the SDGs progress has been varying across member and associate members. Ever growing adverse impacts on both economic and social progress have constrained actions to address climate change consequences. Digitalization policies and regional initiatives are critical to addressing these compounding sustainable development challenges.

To accelerate the SDGs, the Pacific has the potential to shape socioeconomic development strategies through a more affordable and accessible digital technologies. By investing in digital skills development, ICT connectivity and financial inclusion, Government policies and regional initiative can improve peoples’ livelihoods and opportunities for sustainable development.

In this context, the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent sets out the long-term vision and goals for the Pacific region to raise the voices and support the aspirations of the Pacific people, including in the thematic area of technology and connectivity.

This thematic area highlights the need for a well-connected region that ensures inclusive, affordable and accessible air, sea and land transport and ICT technology infrastructure and services. The adoption of new and emerging sustainable digital technologies requires effective partnerships and appropriate regional regulatory arrangements that respect the region’s shared values.

In the upcoming Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4), 27-30 May 2024 in Antigua and Barbuda, there are opportunities for the Pacific members to underscore the importance of promoting digital transformation to drive inclusive economic growth and sustainable development.

This 80th session of the Commission is an important platform to reflect on the digital policies and its implications for the socio-economic prosperity and partnerships in the Pacific. In line with the theme, the side event will further examine the critical role of the regional cooperation around digital transformation in the Pacific to advance the implementation plan of the 2050 Strategy.

Furthermore, the side event aims to provide development partners and stakeholders the opportunity to better understand various dimensions of the digitalization and regional cooperation initiatives to ensure that these new and emerging digital policies are linked to the acceleration of the sustainable development, especially around climate action and partnerships.

# Key Questions and Outcomes

In the Pacific, it is important to synergise the technological development strategies with other existing regional and global approaches and frameworks. There has been growing attention on utilizing ICT services, including e-services and the digital economy within the 2050 Strategy.

Increased access to ICT and digital services can support Pacific governments to improve investment and digital development through regional partnerships for the people and planet through providing policymakers and stakeholders with adequate information and strategic advice.

This side event will examine the following key guiding questions:

1. What are the key dimensions of the digital technologies that are linked to the SDGs at the regional and country level?
2. How can different pillars of the digital transformation and services be utilized for strengthening enabling environment for inclusive digital economy in line with the 2030 Agenda and 2050 Strategy?
3. What are the best practices and lessons learned from the digital systems and services partnerships that can be emphasized in the upcoming 4th International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4)?

Bringing together a *diverse panel*, this side event aims to draw attention to the emerging opportunity among multi-stakeholders to review and refine the Pacific technology and digital development agenda through the regional collective actions. The discussion will highlight issues that are critical to advance Pacific digitalization strategies within the regional and global frameworks of the SDGs and upcoming outcome of the SIDS4 that will chart a new decade of partnerships and solutions towards resilient prosperity.

With the engagement of policy makers and other stakeholders, the discussions will identify pathways forward for the Pacific. By the conclusion of the event, participants should be able to advance the new implementation plan of the 2050 Strategy via thematic area on technology and connectivity as well as to synergise with the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and the advancement of the SDGs target.

# Draft Programme

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| Time  (75 min) | Description |
| 10 min | **Introductory and opening remarks**   * **H.E. Mr. Henry Puna, Secretary-General**, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) * **Ms. Rabab Fatima**, Under-Secretary-General, High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States |
| 10 min | **Overview presentation**   * **Ms. Sarah Mecartney,** Regional Director Melanesia, Pacific Community (SPC) & **Ms. Marina Illingworth**, Engagement Adviser – Multilateral, PIFS |
| 30 min | **Keynote and panel discussions**   * **Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana**, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP * **H.E. Ms. Fekitamoeloa Útoikamanu**, Minister for Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communications and Chair of the 79th Commission session * **H.E. Ms. Lenora Qereqeretabua**, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fiji * **H.E. Mr. Aliioaiga Feturi Elisaia**, High Commissioner of Samoa to Fiji * **Mr. Koney Samuel,** Secretary, Department of National Planning and Monitoring, Papua New Guinea   **Moderator**: **Mr. Sudip Ranjan Basu,** Deputy Head, ESCAP Subregional Office for the Pacific |
| 20 min | **Open discussion**   * Interventions from audience |
| 5 min | **Closing remarks**   * **Ms. Andie Fong Toy**, Head, ESCAP Subregional Office for the Pacific |