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METU**



19–20 November 2026

UNICA Research Meeting

Advancing Research for a Sustainable Future



UNICA Research Meeting 2026

ADVANCING RESEARCH FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

Jointly hosted by
Ankara University and Middle East Technical University (METU)
Wednesday, 18 – Friday, 20 November 2026

CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

As the global scientific community reflects on the outcomes of COP31, universities are playing an increasingly important role in advancing climate action, driving sustainable innovation, and strengthening societal resilience. Beyond generating knowledge, research institutions are expected to foster interdisciplinary collaboration, embrace digital transformation, promote open science, and translate research into solutions that address global challenges.

The UNICA Research Meeting 2026 will bring together Vice-Rectors for Research, senior researchers, and strategic partners to explore how universities can strengthen their contribution to a sustainable future through research excellence, responsible innovation, and international collaboration.

Hosted jointly by Ankara University and Middle East Technical University, the meeting will highlight universities as living laboratories for sustainability - environments where research, innovation, education, and societal engagement come together to develop and implement solutions for the green transition.

The meeting will also provide a platform to reflect on the implications of COP31 for research and higher education, exchange institutional experiences, and identify opportunities for collaboration and joint action across the UNICA network.

TARGET GROUPS

Vice-Rectors Research, EU Research Officers, university representatives and experts in Research Infrastructures, sustainable research practices, data management & security

OBJECTIVES

The 2026 edition aims to:

- Strengthen strategic collaboration among UNICA universities on sustainability-oriented research and innovation.
- Exchange institutional approaches to interdisciplinary research addressing climate, energy, and societal resilience.
- Explore how digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and open science can enhance sustainable research ecosystems.
- Reflect on the implications of COP31 for research policy and identify opportunities for collective action within the UNICA network.
- Foster new partnerships and collaborative initiatives among universities, researchers, and external stakeholders.
- Encourage peer learning and networking through academic exchange and a shared cultural experience.

DRAFT AGENDA

Day 1 | Thursday 18 November 2026

📍 Venue: tbc

18:30

Welcome reception

Day 2 | Thursday 19 November 2026

📍 Venue: Ankara University

8:30-9:00

Welcome coffee

9:00-9:30

Welcome and introduction

- **Necdet ÜNÜVAR**, Rector, Ankara University
- **Ahmet YOZGATLIGIL**, Rector, Middle East Technical University
- **Sorin COSTREIE**, UNICA President

9:30-10:30

Session 1 | Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability

10:30-11:00

Coffee break

11:00-12:30

Session 2 | Sustainable Energy and Green Technologies

12:30-13:30

Lunch

14:00-15:30

Session 3 | Sustainable Cities and Communities

15:30-16:00

Coffee break

16:00-17:30

Session 4 | Key messages and reflections from COP31

19:00-21:30

Networking & Thinking dinner

📍 Venue: tbc

Day 3 | Friday 20 November 2026

📍 Venue: METU Research Park

Welcome coffee

9:30-10:30 Session 5 | Digital Transformation for Sustainability

10:30-11:00 Coffee break

11:00-12:30 Session 6 | AI and sustainability

12:30-13:30 Lunch

Optional Social Programme | Cappadocia - 20–21 November 2026

Following the Research Meeting, participants will have the opportunity to join an **optional self-funded guided visit to Cappadocia**, one of Türkiye's most distinctive cultural and natural landscapes. The programme will begin on **Friday, 20 November**, with departure from Ankara by bus at **16:00** (approximately 4 hours). A guided tour of Cappadocia will take place on **Saturday**, with return transfer by bus to **Ankara Airport** on **Sunday, 22 November**, departing at **11:00**.

PROPOSED SESSIONS

Session 1 | Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability

This session will examine how universities can contribute to climate action through research, campus operations, and societal engagement. Discussions will focus on environmental monitoring, climate-resilient infrastructure, and reducing the environmental impact of research activities. Participants will exchange institutional practices and identify opportunities for collaboration on climate adaptation and mitigation.

Guiding questions:

- How can universities strengthen their role as living laboratories for climate action?
- What institutional strategies can accelerate research on climate adaptation and mitigation?
- How can universities reduce the environmental footprint of research activities and infrastructures?
- What opportunities exist for collaboration among UNICA universities to address climate challenges?

Session 2 | Sustainable Energy and Green Technologies

This session will explore how research and innovation can accelerate Europe's green transition. Discussions will address renewable energy, energy storage, smart grids, low-carbon mobility, and collaboration between universities, industry, and public authorities. Participants will identify

opportunities to strengthen partnerships and advance the development of sustainable technologies.

Guiding questions:

- How can universities accelerate innovation in sustainable energy and green technologies?
- What role can shared research infrastructures play in supporting the green transition?
- How can collaboration between universities, industry, and public authorities be strengthened?
- Which emerging research priorities offer the greatest potential for joint initiatives within UNICA?

Session 3 | Sustainable Cities and Communities

This session will examine how interdisciplinary research can support the development of more sustainable and resilient cities. Discussions will focus on data-driven urban solutions, sustainable mobility, housing, public spaces, and collaboration with local authorities and industry. Participants will consider how universities can contribute to evidence-based urban transformation.

Guiding questions:

- How can universities contribute to the development of more sustainable and resilient cities?
- What interdisciplinary approaches are needed to address urban sustainability challenges?
- How can research better support evidence-based policymaking at the local and regional levels?
- What models of collaboration with cities and external stakeholders have proven most effective?

Session 4 | COP31: Key Messages and Reflections

This session will reflect on the outcomes of COP31 and their implications for research and higher education. Discussions will explore how global climate commitments can be translated into institutional research strategies, campus sustainability initiatives, and international collaboration. Participants will identify shared priorities and opportunities for collective action across the UNICA network.

Guiding questions:

- What are the most significant outcomes of COP31 for universities and research institutions?
- How can global climate commitments be translated into institutional research strategies?
- What role should universities play in supporting the implementation of climate policies?
- Which areas offer the greatest potential for collective action across the UNICA network?

Session 5 | Digital Transformation for Sustainability

This session will examine how digital technologies can support sustainable research ecosystems. Discussions will address research data management, digital collaboration platforms, open science, and secure research infrastructures. Participants will explore how digital transformation can strengthen research quality, efficiency, and cross-institutional collaboration.

Guiding questions:

- How can digital technologies strengthen sustainable research ecosystems?
- What role do open science and research data management play in advancing sustainability?
- How can universities ensure that digital transformation is secure, ethical, and inclusive?
- What opportunities exist for greater digital collaboration among UNICA universities?

Session 6 | AI & Sustainability

This session will explore the role of artificial intelligence in advancing sustainability research and innovation. Discussions will focus on applications in environmental monitoring, predictive modelling, resource optimisation, and decision support, alongside ethical, governance, and research integrity considerations. Participants will identify approaches for the responsible integration of AI into sustainability strategies across UNICA universities.

Guiding questions:

- How can artificial intelligence accelerate sustainability research and innovation?
- What ethical and governance challenges should universities address when adopting AI?
- How can AI support more effective decision-making in research and sustainability initiatives?
- What opportunities exist for collaboration on responsible AI across the UNICA network?