UNICA

ANKARA UNIVERSITY 1946

ODTÜ METU

Co-funded by the European Union

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

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. 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.

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 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.

PROGRAMME

As of 27 October 2026

Day 1 | Wednesday 18 November 2026	
Venue: METU (Culture and Convention Center) Map: https://route.metu.edu.tr/place/64/cultural-and-convention-center	
18:30	*Welcome reception*

Day 2| Thursday 19 November 2026	
Venue: Ankara University Rectorate Building Senato Room	
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 • **Luciano SASO**, UNICA Secretary General
9:30-10:30	**Session 1 | Key messages and reflections from COP31** (Ankara University Senato Room) Taking place shortly after COP31 in Türkiye, this session will reflect on the conference's key messages and their implications for universities and the research community. Discussions will consider how global climate commitments can inform research and innovation priorities and how universities can contribute to translating these commitments into concrete action. Chair: **Kaan ORHAN** - Vice-Rector for Research and Internationalization, Ankara University Confirmed panelists • **Elchin BABAYEV** - Rector, Baku State University • **Fatih KESKIN -** Dean of the Faculty of Communication, Ankara University; COP31 Panels Moderator
10:30-11:00	***Coffee break*** *(Exhibition Ankara University History Museum)*
Venue: Ankara University Research and Innovation Center	

11:00-12:30	**Session 2 | Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability** This session will explore how universities are responding to climate change through research, innovation and institutional action. It will consider the role of interdisciplinary approaches, universities as living laboratories, and stronger connections between research, policy and practice in advancing climate and environmental sustainability. Chair: **İlkay DELLAL** - Head, Department of Climate Change and Sustainability, Ankara University Confirmed panelists: • **Josep FORTÓ ARENY** - Vice-Rector, University of Andorra • **Ewa KROGULEC** - Vice-Rector for Development, University of Warsaw • **Andrej PEROVIĆ** - Full Professor, Department of Biology, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, University of Montenegro • **Duygu SAĞ,** UNESCO International Decade of Sciences for Sustainable Development (IDDSD) National Focal Point of Türkiye
12:30-13:30	***Lunch***
14:00-15:30	**Session 3 | Sustainable Cities and Communities** This session will explore how universities can contribute to more sustainable, resilient and inclusive cities and communities. It will consider the role of research, living laboratories and university–city partnerships in addressing challenges such as climate adaptation, sustainable mobility, urban infrastructure and community engagement. Chair: **Luciano SASO**, UNICA Secretary General Confirmed panelists: • **Erekle ASTAKHISHVILI** - Vice-Rector, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University • **Tamás BARTUS** - Vice-Rector for Faculty and Research, Corvinus University of Budapest • **Harun TANRIVERMIŞ** - Vice-Rector for Societal Contribution and Entrepreneurship, Ankara University • **Evrim ÖLÇER ÖZÜNEL** - UNESCO, Member of Specialized Committee on Cultural Heritage Policies, Ankara Haci Bayram Veli University
15:30-16:00	***Coffee break*** *(Exhibition of International Student Charrettes (IFLA World Global Studio Program) and the Nature Cities Alliance (EPD-Net Erasmus+ Project)*
16:00-17:30	**Session 4 | Sustainable Energy and Green Technologies** This session will examine how research and innovation can accelerate the green transition. Discussions will focus on renewable energy, energy storage, smart energy systems, low-carbon mobility and green technologies, as well as the role

	of universities in strengthening collaboration with industry and public authorities and moving solutions from research towards implementation. Chair: (TBC) Confirmed panelists: • **Agustin VALERA-MEDINA** - Director Net Zero Innovation Institute, Cardiff University (online) • **Ramazan SARI** - Professor, Department of Technology, Management and Economics, Denmark Technical University • **Selcuk YERCI** – Chair of the Board of Directors in the Center for Solar Energy Research and Applications (GÜNAM), Middle East Technical University
19:00-21:30	***Networking & Thinking dinner*** Venue: Ankara University Rectorate Building

Day 3 | Friday 20 November 2026	
Venue: METU (Culture and Convention Center) Map: https://route.metu.edu.tr/place/64/cultural-and-convention-center	
8:30-9:00	***Welcome coffee***
9:30-10:30	**Session 5 | Digital Transformation for Sustainability** This session will examine how digital transformation can strengthen sustainable and connected research ecosystems. Discussions will address digital research infrastructures, research data, open science, digital collaboration and the institutional conditions needed to ensure that digitalisation contributes to research quality, sustainability and resilience. Chair: **Ender CIĞEROĞLU** - Vice-President for Research, Middle East Technical University Confirmed panelists: • **Mojca CIGLARIČ** - Professor, University of Ljubljana • **Edita LENKAUSKAITĖ** - Doctoral Researcher in Management; Member of the University Senate, Klaipėda University • **Pawel WLODARSKI** - Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, former Vice Rector for International Relations, Promotion & Development, Medical University Warsaw
10:30-11:00	***Coffee break***

11:00-12:30	**Session 6 | AI and sustainability** This session will explore the opportunities and challenges presented by artificial intelligence in the context of sustainability. Discussions will consider how AI can support climate and sustainability research, while also addressing its environmental footprint, research infrastructure needs, responsible use and the role of universities in developing sustainable and trustworthy AI. Chair: **Mecit OZTOP** – Advisor to the President, Middle East Technical University Confirmed panelists: • **Andris BĒRZIŅŠ** - Vice-Dean for Research, University of Latvia • **Tiina PAJUSTE** - Vice-Rector for Research, Tallinn University • **Manuela TVARONAVICIENĖ** - Director at Entrepreneurship and Sustainability Center, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University
12:30-13:30	***Lunch***
13:30-14:30	***Guided tour of METU campus (****by bus and on foot****)***

Optional Social Programme | Cappadocia - 20–21 November 2026

20–22 November 2026 | Participation fee: €250 (self-funded)

Extend your UNICA Research Meeting experience with a journey to ***Cappadocia****, one of Türkiye's most extraordinary landscapes, where striking natural formations meet centuries of history and cultural heritage.*

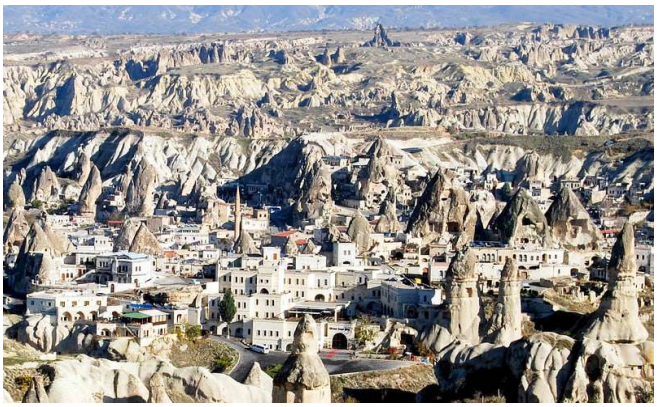
Departing directly from METU after the final panels on Friday, 20 November, this two-night excursion offers participants the opportunity to discover the region alongside fellow colleagues from across the UNICA network. The programme includes a full-day guided tour led by local experts, visits to museums and historical sites, and time to experience Cappadocia's unique cultural landscape.

The ***€250 participation fee*** *covers round-trip bus transfers from Ankara to Cappadocia and onward to Ankara Airport, two nights' accommodation at the Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University Hotel, two breakfasts, one lunch, two dinners, and all museum and historical site entrance fees.*

A chance to continue conversations beyond the conference, discover a remarkable part of Türkiye, and strengthen connections across the UNICA community.

✈️ ***Flight connections:*** *Participants wishing to continue their journey directly to İstanbul can also explore direct flight options from Nevşehir Cappadocia Airport (NAV) or Kayseri Airport (ASR).*

Please note: Participation is optional and self-funded. The detailed programme will be shared with registered participants.





Detailed Itinerary & Programme

Day 1: Friday, 20 November 2026- Journey to the Fairy Chimneys

16:00 - Departure by private coach from Ankara (approx. 4-hour scenic drive).

20:00 - Arrival in Cappadocia, hotel check-in.

20:30 - Welcome dinner at the hotel and evening orientation.

Day 2: Saturday, 21 November 2026 — Exploring the Heart of Cappadocia

08:00 – 09:30 - Breakfast at the hotel.

09:30 - Full-day guided exploration covering key historical highlights:

- *Göreme Open-Air Museum (rock-cut churches and Byzantine frescoes).*
- *Uchisar Castle viewpoint.*
- *Pasabag (Monks Valley) and the iconic multi-headed fairy chimneys.*

13:00 – 14:30 - Traditional Cappadocian lunch at a local historic venue.

14:30 – 17:30 - Continuation of the tour (Avanos pottery workshops and Devrent Valley / Imagination Valley).

19:30 Group dinner and relaxation.

Day 3: Sunday, 22 November 2026 Farewell & Departure

08:00 – 09:30 - Breakfast at the hotel and check-out.

11:00 - Departure by bus from Cappadocia to Ankara Esenboğa Airport (ESB).