UNICA

ANKARA ÜNİVERSİTESİ 1946

ODTÜ METU

Co-funded by the European Union

19–20 November 2026

UNICA Research Meeting

Advancing Research for a Sustainable Future

UNICA
Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe

ORTA DOĞU TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

Co-funded by the European Union

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 2 October 2026

Day 1 | Wednesday 18 November 2026	
📍 Venue: METU (Culture and Congress 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 | 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. Confirmed panelists: • **İlkay DELLAL** - Head, Department of Climate Change and Sustainability, Ankara University • **Josep FORTÓ ARENY** - Vice-Rector, University of Andorra • **Ewa KROGULEC** - Vice-Rector for Development, University of Warsaw • **Andrej PEROVIĆ** - Professor, University of Montenegro
10:30-11:00	***Coffee break*** *(Exhibition Ankara University History Museum)*
📍 Venue: Ankara University Research and Innovation Center	
11:00-12:30	**Session 2 | 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. Confirmed panelists: • **Selcuk YERCI** - Head of Center for Solar Energy Research and Application, Middle East Technical University
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. Confirmed panelists: • **Tamás BARTUS** - Vice-Rector for Faculty and Research, Corvinus University of Budapest • **Harun TANRIVERMIŞ** - Vice-Rector for Societal Contribution and Entrepreneurship, Ankara 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 | 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. Confirmed panelists: • **Kaan ORHAN** - Vice-Rector for Research and Internationalization, Ankara University
19:00-21:30	***Networking & Thinking dinner*** 📍 Venue: Ankara University Rectorate Building

Day 3 | Friday 20 November 2026	
📍 Venue: METU (Culture and Congress 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. Confirmed panelists: • **Ender CIĞEROĞLU** - Vice-Rector for Research, Middle East Technical University • **Mojca CIGLARIČ** - Professor, University of Ljubljana • **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*** *(walking tour to the Department of Architecture)*
📍 Venue: METU (*Department of Architecture*)	
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. Confirmed panelists: • **Andris BĒRZIŅŠ** - Vice-Dean for Research, University of Latvia • **Mecit OZTOP** - Rector Advisor, Middle East Technical University • **Tiina PAJUSTE** - Vice-Rector for Research, Tallin University
12:30-13:30	***Lunch***
13:30-14:30	***Campus tour of METU with double-decker bus***

Optional Social Programme | Cappadocia - 20–21 November 2026

*Following the Research Meeting, participants will have the opportunity to join an **optional self-funded (around 250 euro) 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**.*

There are direct flights from Nevşehir Cappadocia Airport (NAV) to İstanbul and from Kayseri Airport (ASR) to İstanbul.