

12th INTERNATIONAL TURKCESS CONGRESS ON EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

FINAL REPORT

3-5 September 2026 | Near East University | Nicosia, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

The International TURKCESS Congress on Education and Social Sciences has been held continuously since 2015. Since its establishment, the Congress has sought to bring the educational sciences together with the social sciences and humanities on a common platform, to consolidate academic work conducted across the Turkish cultural geography within a regular forum, and to provide young researchers with an environment in which they can make their first international academic contacts. In line with this approach, the Congress has convened across a broad geography extending from Hatay to Sinop, Gaziantep to Istanbul, Nicosia to Prizren, and Baku to Skopje. Its twelfth edition was hosted by Near East University in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus on 3-5 September 2026. By moving the host location to a different center for each edition, the Congress has evolved beyond being an event associated with a single institution and has become a mechanism that sustains the cross-border academic engagement of our country's higher education system.

The main theme of this year's Congress was "Inclusivity, Sustainability and Transformation in Education in the New Century." Subthemes included education for sustainable development; sustainable education in schools and teacher education; inclusive education after earthquakes; quality and inclusivity in higher education; inclusive and lifelong education within the UNESCO framework; and developing awareness in sustainability education from the local to the global level.

The Honorary Board of the Congress consisted of 24 members: the Minister of National Education of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and 23 rectors and heads of institutions from Türkiye, the TRNC, Kosovo, and Uzbekistan. The Organizing Committee comprised 27 members from eight countries, including three co-chairs, while the Scientific Committee included approximately 195 members from 14 countries. In addition to Türkiye and the TRNC, the Scientific Committee included representatives of universities, academies, and institutes from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Moldova, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, Romania, the United States, and the regions of Crimea. More than 100 distinct institutions were represented across the committees. This structure demonstrates that the international character of the Congress extended beyond participation and was also reflected in its evaluation and decision-making processes.

The scientific program consisted of an opening panel, twelve invited talks, eight workshops, and approximately 350 oral presentations. Presentations were delivered across fourteen parallel sessions in face-to-face and online formats. Papers were presented in Turkish, English, and other Turkic

languages; in addition to Türkiye and the TRNC, researchers from Azerbaijan, the United States, Kosovo, Ukraine, Italy, Germany, Nigeria, and the United Kingdom took part in the program.

Key Research Areas Highlighted at the Congress

An examination of the papers presented clearly reveals the directions in which the field is developing.

***The first area is inclusive education and special education.** A broad cluster of studies emerged, ranging from the participation of individuals with autism spectrum disorder in the workforce and parental involvement for children with hearing impairment to perceptions of neurodiversity and the campus experiences of visually impaired students in higher education.*

***The second area is sustainability and environmental education.** Ecopedagogical approaches, climate justice and intergenerational justice in textbooks, out-of-school and nature-based learning environments, ecological well-being, and transforming climate anxiety among children and parents into action were addressed under this theme.*

***The third area is artificial intelligence and digital transformation.** Teachers' pedagogical reasoning in relation to generative artificial intelligence, AI anxiety among pre-service teachers, the assessment of digital citizenship skills, and cognitive studies using eye-tracking methods were prominent. On a contrasting axis, numerous studies addressed problematic digital use, social media addiction, and digital stress.*

***The fourth area is disaster and trauma studies.** This theme examined the effects of the 6 February 2023 earthquakes on educational processes, school belonging and school well-being among adolescents after the earthquakes, teachers' post-traumatic experiences, and the sustainability of collective memory.*

***The fifth area is the Türkiye Century Education Model.** More than ten papers examined the Model in terms of curricula, textbooks, assessment and evaluation practices, and artificial intelligence literacy frameworks. This concentration indicates that implementation in the field has begun to be subject to academic monitoring. In addition, the substantial volume of scale-development and cross-cultural adaptation studies reflects a tendency within the field to strengthen its measurement infrastructure.*

Conclusions and Matters Submitted for Consideration

The value of the body of knowledge generated at the Congress derives not only from its scientific volume, but also from its direct relationship with national and international policy agendas.

At the national level, the Council of Higher Education's 2024-2028 Strategic Plan identifies the transformation of university campuses into sustainable and climate-friendly campuses as a distinct

strategic objective. Within this objective, targets include ensuring that at least ten of our universities rank among the top 100 in the UI GreenMetric ranking within five years, and ensuring that students with special needs have access to universities, can fully benefit from educational opportunities, and are able to participate in teaching and learning. Achieving digital transformation in higher education is defined as a separate objective. The more than 350 studies brought together by the Congress around the axes of inclusivity, sustainability, and digital transformation directly correspond to all three of these objectives.

Papers addressing inclusive education and access to higher education for individuals with special needs have the potential to provide field data for the second objective; studies on ecopedagogy and sustainable campuses for the first objective; and studies on artificial intelligence and digital literacy for the digital transformation objective. The same body of knowledge also aligns with the qualified human resources and green transformation goals envisaged in the Council of Higher Education's 2030 Vision and the Twelfth Development Plan. It is additionally valuable in that it includes some of the first academic monitoring studies concerning the implementation of the Ministry of National Education's Türkiye Century Education Model.

At the international level, our country has undertaken the most visible responsibility in climate diplomacy in its history. The United Nations Climate Change Conference will be hosted by Türkiye in Antalya from 9 to 20 November 2026. Meetings will take place at the Antalya EXPO Center, and the conference will encompass COP31 as well as the twenty-first meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol and the eighth meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement. The COP31 Presidency has announced an Action Agenda comprising ten priority themes with measurable 2035 targets, together with a program of thematic days.

The educational dimension of this process is not merely an optional area of contribution. Article 12 of the Paris Agreement and Article 6 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change require Parties to build capacity in education, training, public awareness, public participation, and access to information concerning climate change. Higher education institutions are direct drivers of this agenda, which is addressed in the international literature under the concept of "Action for Climate Empowerment." Similarly, UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development: Towards Achieving the SDGs (ESD for 2030) framework and Sustainable Development Goal 4 treat inclusivity and sustainability as two dimensions of the same policy objective. Our country's 2053 net-zero emissions target and Green Deal Action Plan are also aligned with this framework.

***TURKCESS 2026** generated a national and regional body of knowledge in precisely the area indicated by these provisions, two months before the Antalya process. The designation of inclusivity and sustainability as the main theme of the Congress means that this body of knowledge was not produced by coincidence; rather, the resulting pool of studies constitutes a ready resource that our country can present on the education front during the COP31 process. Furthermore, the extensive*

network established by the Congress across the Turkic world and the Balkans makes it possible for this body of knowledge to be presented not only as a national contribution but also as a regional one.

Within this framework, the following matters are respectfully submitted for your consideration.

1. A thematic compilation of the sustainability and climate education studies presented at the Congress is currently being prepared. Should you deem it appropriate, this compilation will be submitted to your Office, according to a schedule to be determined by you, as a national contribution to the education and capacity-building component of the COP31 Action Agenda.
2. Should a side event on climate literacy in higher education and teacher education be envisaged within the scope of COP31, the studies presented at the Congress already provide the scientific foundation for such an event. Our Committee is ready to contribute under the coordination of your Office.
3. Practical examples presented at the Congress concerning the integration of sustainability and climate literacy into teacher education programs have been compiled in a form suitable for use at the course-content level. They will be submitted to your Office upon request.
4. The academic network established by the Congress across the Turkic world and the TRNC, encompassing more than 100 institutions and fourteen countries, provides a ready foundation for joint graduate and joint doctoral programs. The potential use of this foundation is respectfully submitted for your consideration.
5. The findings generated at the Congress on inclusive education and access to higher education for students with special needs have been classified in a manner that can inform the relevant monitoring and evaluation activities of your Office.

Respectfully submitted,

Prof. Dr. Mehmet Engin DENİZ

On behalf of the Organizing Committee