

EU STEM Coalition General Assembly

April 2026, Istanbul

22 April

Welcome

On 22 and 23 April 2026, the EU STEM Coalition held their General Assembly (GA) on the shores of the Bosphorus in Istanbul, Türkiye. Our host was the Turkish STEM Alliance. During these General Assemblies, we (re)connect with each other and learn from one another, and create common views and understanding. We look back on the last six months as well as look to the future.

This spring we marked the 10-year anniversary of the EU STEM Coalition, a true milestone. We acknowledge the founders and all these individuals that helped shape the network to what it is now.

After welcoming many familiar faces and a couple new ones as well, the General Assembly commenced with a warm welcome from our Turkish hosts Gultekin Cakmakci and from the EU STEM Coalition secretariat Rolf Schreuder.

Commemoration Beatrice Boots

Then we proceeded to commemorate Beatrice Boots, chairwoman and co-founder of the EU STEM Coalition. Pieter Moerman, her co-director of Platform Talent voor Technology (Dutch STEM Platform) shared more information on her passing as well as kind words on her work and their working relationship. After Pieter read out a message from Beatrice's husband, the floor was opened to share any memories of Beatrice.



EU STEM Coalition General Assembly

April 2026, Istanbul

Looking forward to the Coalition's future

Following the legacy of Beatrice Boots, the EU STEM Coalition looked forward to the future. With a short moment to also look back on 10 years of the EU STEM Coalition which was created in 2016. Rolf Schreuder presented an analysis of why there is a need for the EU STEM Coalition to exist with our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and the current STEM (policy) landscape in Europe.

Additionally, Rolf presented the proposal for a new governance structure for the EU STEM Coalition. This would consist of the current secretariat, but instead of a chairperson), the network would form a rotating members committee of 3 to 5 members to steer the secretariat. Moreover, a high level panel of ambassadors and advisors would be established to set the course on a more political and strategic level.

Also, Pieter and Rolf looked ahead concerning financial aspects and stressed the need to find resources to sustain and expend our efforts.



Walking dinner with posters

To end the evening, the attendees enjoyed a walking dinner to talk to new members, fellow working group members and other attendees.

During the dinner, the posters with best practices of our members were also displayed around the room to learn more about our members' activities and as a nice conversation starter. The posters will be published on the website.

EU STEM Coalition General Assembly

April 2026, Istanbul

23 April

Welcome by Turkish former Minister of Education prof. dr. Ziya Selçuk

The following day the General Assembly started with a welcoming address from Turkish former minister of education prof. dr. Ziya Selçuk. Dr Selçuk inspired the audience with a thought provoking talk about preparing students for the quantum age by valuing questions over answers and fostering creativity through exploration and adaptability. You can read the full text of his speech on our website.

Presentation on best practices of STEM Education in Türkiye

As hosts, Prof. Dr. Gültekin Çakmakçı (re)introduced the Turkish STEM Alliance to the EU STEM Coalition, highlighting its mission to advance STEM education in Türkiye. Established in 2015, the Alliance unites STEM practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and the public to elevate the quality of STEM education and expand participation in the field. Its key priorities include public engagement, teacher professional development, open science, citizen science, and cross-sector collaboration. During the presentation, Prof. Dr. Çakmakçı showcased successful initiatives aimed at fostering public engagement with STEM, such as the STEM & Makers Fest/Expo, Teknofest, and DENEYAP. Additionally, Türkiye boasts a diverse range of STEM-related programs, including many science centers, science and art centers, and the Teachers First Foundation.



EU STEM Coalition General Assembly

April 2026, Istanbul

Coalition updates

Fleur Korte provided an update on the activities of the EU STEM Coalition of the last 6 months, since the last General Assembly in November 2025 in Brussels. EU STEM Coalition members have worked hard to hand in multiple proposals for the new Erasmus+ projects, in particular the pilot for STEM Education Centres. Aside from the proposals, the coalition has been in contact with the Commission for upcoming calls and STEM-related opportunities. Additionally, the working groups, which started at the last GA, have had their first online meetings as well. To ensure our visibility, the coalition has been part of many events, round tables, and panels, as well as attending policy events in Brussels and the rest of Europe. Finally, the four new members of the EU STEM Coalition introduced themselves. European Society for Engineering Education (SEFI) and Brightlab/RVO Society presented their organisation live at the GA, whilst Midlands Ireland and STEM Island send in a video to introduce themselves.

Keynote Paula Walsche

After a short coffee break, PhD researcher Paula Walsche from the South East Technological University in Ireland held her keynote on the underestimated important on early childhood STEM engagement. She stressed the relevance of children developing digital competences to hone their skills, knowledge and attitude. Plus, she debunked the fact that learning more about technology and digital automatically means more screen time, which is a controversial topic for school teachers and parents. She provided examples of how to engage children with these topics without screen time.



EU STEM Coalition General Assembly

April 2026, Istanbul

Walsche proceeded with her work for the Connecting Women in Digital initiative by the European Commission (DG CONNECT) and how to encourage girls and women to choose ICT education. The last part of the keynote she focused on the leaking STEM pipeline in Ireland and how her research contributes to solving this problem. In Ireland, the largest leakage occurs between secondary education and VET/higher education. Walsche's research questions whether this leakage can be solved by sparking STEM interest already in early childhood and ensuring teachers have the ability and willingness to incorporate STE(A)M into their curriculum. As a result, she created a framework to include "STEAM from the start".

Workshop policy recommendations

After the lunch break, the General Assembly continued with an interactive session on policy recommendations. With a lot of new upcoming policy and calls, and the upcoming Irish Council Presidency, it was a good time to ask for input from the EU STEM Coalition members to voice our wishes and ideas for the future. The three topics

discussed in question were: the EU Teachers and Trainers Agenda, the Irish presidency, and the upcoming Erasmus+ work programme for 2027. With the Walt Disney model of the Dreamer, the Maker, and the Critic, the group of attendees was split up in 3 subgroups rotating to discuss all three topics at three different rounds. The EU STEM Coalition secretariat have collected the input as the basis for upcoming papers and memos.



EU STEM Coalition General Assembly

April 2026, Istanbul

Keynote Pedro Russo

Pedro Russo, Associate Professor and President of *Ciência Viva* (Portugal's National Agency for Scientific and Technological Culture), presented insights on building a sustainable scientific and technological culture. He highlighted the role of *Ciência Viva* in shaping Portugal's STEM infrastructure, which includes a network of science centers across the country. These centers are governed collaboratively by local governments, universities, and *Ciência Viva*, creating innovation helix. Pedro also shared case studies from Portugal, such as space activities in schools and initiatives to promote space and STEM careers. Finally, he discussed Portugal's journey in improving science literacy. He emphasized the importance in addressing challenges in priority technological domains, including AI, quantum computing, space, health, and the green transition.

Pedro Russo ended this keynote with an interesting and thought provoking quote: "In a context of rapid technological change and geopolitical competition, Europe's (and Portugal's) capacity to create quality jobs depends not only on innovation and skills, but on a strong scientific and technological culture that enables anticipation, agency, and social legitimacy."



EU STEM Coalition General Assembly

April 2026, Istanbul

Closing session

Rolf Schreuder, Gultekin Cakmakci, and Fleur Korte ended the General Assembly with concluding remarks on a GA with lots of networking, knowledge sharing, and looking to the future as a network.



Thank you to the Turkish STEM Alliance for being our great hosts as well as to everyone attending, thank you for coming. We hope to see you at our next General Assembly later this year in Germany!

