



The East African Community Regional Education Conference 2026



FROM COMMITMENTS TO IMPACT: FOSTERING RESILIENT AND FUTURE-READY SYSTEMS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

25-28 August 2026
Nairobi, Kenya

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

Introduction

The East African Community (EAC) will hold the 2nd Edition of the EAC Regional Education Conference (EACREC2026) from 25th-28th August 2026 in Nairobi, Kenya.

The Conference has its genesis in the 15th meeting of the EAC Sectoral Council on Education, Science and Technology, Culture and Sports (SCESTCS) that approved the establishment of an EAC Regional Forum on Education.

This 2nd Conference will follow up on some of the key resolutions from the 1st Conference, held in August 2024 in Arusha, Tanzania, and report on progress made in some of the areas. It will bring together key stakeholders, actors, and partners in the education sector to exchange experiences and develop strategies and frameworks for addressing the challenges facing the education sector of the region.

The Conference theme is “From Commitments to Impact: Fostering Resilient and Future-Ready Systems for Sustainable Development,” with eight sub-themes highlighting various aspects of the theme.

About the Conference

Conference Theme and Sub-Themes

In the past several years, EAC Partner States have made strong commitments and efforts to develop and strengthen their education systems. Various national and regional efforts demonstrate this commitment, including the process of harmonizing Partner State curricula at the regional level. They have also continued to align their education systems with relevant regional and global frameworks, including EAC Vision 2050, CESA 2026-35, African Union Agenda 2063, and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). As a result, the EAC Partner States have recorded significant progress in education in several areas and sectors.

Despite these achievements, challenges persist across the education sector. Early childhood education remains inaccessible for the majority of children. The quality of primary education remains a concern, with large class sizes, inadequate learning materials, and a shortage of qualified teachers limiting learning outcomes. At the secondary and tertiary levels, the region continues to face major structural and access-related challenges. Transition rates between primary, secondary, and higher education remain weak, contributing to high dropout rates and a shortage of skilled graduates entering the labor market. Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) systems are underdeveloped, with limited industry linkage and insufficient capacity to absorb the growing youth population as articulated in the 7th Development Strategy 2026- 31. Exacerbating these regional challenges are emerging and ongoing disruptions such as pandemics, climate change, conflict, technological shifts, and evolving labour market demands.

To face such challenges, the education systems of the EAC Partner States need new transformations, enhanced commitment, and more resilience. The Conference comes at a time when the region must move beyond commitments on paper to measurable, system-wide impact. The 2026 Conference theme, **“From Commitments to Impact: Fostering Resilient and Future-Ready Systems for Sustainable Development,”** highlights that through collective action and regional cooperation, education can serve as a powerful catalyst for sustainable development and shared prosperity in East Africa. Eight sub-themes further apply the Conference theme to eight key areas of education.

Sub-Theme 1: Strengthening Early and Foundational Learning

Investing in early and foundational learning is one of the most cost-effective strategies for improving education quality, equity, and resilience. Early and foundational learning is the bedrock of lifelong learning, human capital development, and sustainable socio-economic transformation. Although significant progress has been made in expanding access at this level, persistent challenges remain in learning outcomes, equity, quality, and system coherence, particularly in foundational literacy, numeracy, and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL).

Evidence from across the region shows that many learners complete the early grades (1-3) without acquiring essential foundational skills, limiting their ability to progress successfully through the education system. These challenges are compounded by misalignment between learners' home language and the language of instruction as well as disparities affecting children in marginalized communities, including rural populations, refugees, children with disabilities, and those affected by poverty and crises. Strengthening early and foundational learning requires coordinated regional action, policy coherence, sustainable financing, and investment in teacher professional development and support, curriculum reforms, reliable assessment systems, and family and community engagement. This conference provides a timely platform for EAC Partner States and stakeholders to reflect on progress since the commitments from the first conference and to explore practical ways to move from commitments to impact by prioritizing strong learning foundations as a regional development imperative, building on achievements, and leveraging emerging opportunities.

Sessions under this sub-theme aim to explore the actions needed to ensure that every child in East Africa acquires the foundational skills and competencies to thrive and contribute to sustainable development. This sub-theme will also focus on current innovations in enhancing foundational literacy and numeracy across East Africa and explore at scale programs that are sustainable and state-led.

Sub-Theme 2: Enhancing Teacher Capacity and Professional Development

Enhancing teacher capacity and professional development is fundamental to transforming the education systems of the EAC Partner States. It is also important in advancing quality, equity, and innovation in education and ensuring improved learning outcomes for all learners. This is due to the central role of teachers in improving learning outcomes and achieving equitable, quality education and the overall success of the education systems. In recent years, the EAC Partner States have made strides in expanding access to education, implemented curricula, digital learning reforms, and inclusive education policies leading to demands on teachers at a time when the national education systems are facing persistent teacher challenges—including teacher shortages, teacher quality, uneven distribution of teachers in different regions, limited Continuous Professional Development (CPD), inadequate mentorship systems, high attrition rates and resource constraints, all of which undermine the effectiveness of the teaching workforce.

This sub-theme provides a platform for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to examine the perennial and emerging challenges in teacher capacities and professional development in the EAC and propose strategies and ways of addressing them. Sessions in this sub-theme will also share best practices that could enhance the building of a competent, adaptable, and motivated teaching workforce for the EAC region. It will further explore opportunities for mutual recognition of teaching qualifications and cross-border collaboration within the EAC.

Sub-Theme 3: Promoting Inclusive Education for Vulnerable Groups

Promoting inclusive education for vulnerable groups is essential for achieving sustainable development, social cohesion, and economic transformation in the East African Community.

Through this, the EAC can build resilient education systems that serve all learners—particularly those most at risk of exclusion. The sub-theme aims to foster dialogue, share evidence-based practices, and strengthen national and regional efforts aimed at ensuring that no learner is left behind.

Sessions under this sub-theme will highlight contemporary developments and efforts being made towards implementation of inclusive education, including policy innovations and approaches and the role of various actors and stakeholders in enhancing inclusive, equitable, and quality education for vulnerable groups. This sub-theme will further showcase best practices and successful models or interventions that improve access, participation, and learning outcomes for vulnerable learners. Sessions may also explore the role of assistive technologies, digital learning platforms, and flexible delivery models in reaching marginalized learners.

Sub-Theme 4: Leveraging EdTech, Digitalization and Innovation

Digital transformation is rapidly reshaping education systems worldwide, redefining how knowledge is accessed, delivered, and assessed. Some of the EAC Partner State education systems have made progress in expanding internet connectivity, mobile penetration, and innovation ecosystems, which present a unique opportunity to reimagine learning. However, persistent challenges such as digital divides, infrastructure gaps, limited digital literacy, and inequitable access to devices continue to constrain inclusive progress. This sub-theme explores how digital transformation can drive equitable, resilient, and future-ready education systems in East Africa, aligned with regional development frameworks such as the East African Community and continental priorities under the African Union. It will explore how emerging digital trends (AI, e-learning platforms, blended learning, EdTech ecosystems) are shaping education in the EAC Partner States.

Sessions under this theme will share best practices, policies, and innovations to promote innovative and inclusive digital learning. Sessions may also explore the opportunities that these developments portend for research and innovation, including in higher education. By fostering dialogue, innovation, and collaboration, this sub-theme will contribute to shaping a digitally empowered and inclusive future of learning in East Africa that is enabled by EdTech.

Sub-Theme 5: Boosting TVET, Skills development and Youth Agency in the World of Work

Strengthening Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is critical to empowering youth to be active agents in shaping their career pathways, entrepreneurship, and participation in decent work. Youth constitute the largest and most dynamic segment of the population in the EAC and thus present both a significant opportunity and a critical development challenge. Despite progress in TVET, many youths continue to face barriers to accessing decent work, entrepreneurship opportunities, and rapidly evolving labor markets.

Structural unemployment, skills mismatches, informality, technological changes, and limited access to finance and mentorship constrain youth transitions from education and training to work. Strengthening youth agency in the world of work requires reimagining TVET and skills development systems to be more responsive, inclusive, and empowering—supporting youth voice, leadership, entrepreneurship, and lifelong learning. This sub-theme provides a platform to advance policy dialogue, share innovations, and foster partnerships that place youth at the centre of workforce development in the EAC. It will catalyse regional action to transform TVET and skills systems, ensuring young people are equipped, empowered, and supported to shape their futures, contribute meaningfully to the region’s economic transformation and encourage skills mobility in the region to widen the job market.

Sessions under this sub-theme may explore several emerging issues such as demand-driven and competency-based TVET systems; flexible learning pathways and recognition of prior learning; digital, green, and transferable skills; apprenticeships, internships, work-based learning; enterprise development; promotion of decent work and opportunities for youths in marginalized environments; and engagement with the private sector. Sessions should contribute to practical policy recommendations to enhance youth agency in TVET and employment systems, improved collaboration between education systems and the labour market, documentation of innovative practices and scalable models, and a harmonised TVET system in EAC.

Sub-Theme 6: Education Financing, Accountability, Leadership and Governance

Improving education financing, accountability, leadership, and governance is essential for delivering quality and inclusive education in the EAC. By strengthening fiscal sustainability, transparency, institutional leadership, and effectiveness, the EAC can build resilient education systems capable of meeting the evolving needs of its growing population and advancing regional integration and development. Rapid population growth, expanding secondary and tertiary enrolment, curriculum reforms, and digital transformation initiatives place additional pressure on already constrained education budgets. Developing and strengthening financing models, transparency, and governance frameworks is therefore critical to ensuring value for money, equity, and improved learning outcomes across the EAC region.

Sessions under this sub-theme will open up a dialogue among policymakers, education leaders, development partners and researchers on innovative and sustainable approaches to financing education, enhancing accountability systems, and strengthening education leadership and governance structures within EAC Partner States. Sessions may explore current leadership and governance structures, expenditure patterns, funding gaps, and efficiency challenges in the education systems of the EAC Partner States, while proposing innovative mechanisms and strategies.

Sub-Theme 7: Data-Driven Decision-Making and Evidence-Based Policies

Effective policymaking increasingly depends on the availability and use of quality data. Despite progress in strengthening national statistical systems and Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), educational data challenges persist. Countries grapple with fragmented data systems, inadequate analytical capacity,

weak data governance frameworks, and underutilization of research findings in policy design and implementation. Enhancing data-driven decision-making is therefore critical to improving efficiency, transparency, accountability, and development outcomes across the EAC region.

This sub-theme aims to promote dialogue and knowledge exchange on strengthening data ecosystems and institutional capacities to support evidence-based policymaking, planning, implementation, monitoring and impact evaluation of the education systems of the EAC Partner States. Sessions under this sub-theme may highlight innovations, regional collaboration mechanisms, and best practices that enhance the generation, analysis, and use of data for informed decision-making. Sessions may also explore mechanisms to leverage technology, including artificial intelligence, and integrate research findings and real-time data into planning, budgeting, and monitoring processes. Sessions may identify approaches to build analytical skills among policymakers, planners, and technical officers and also discuss frameworks for data protection and strengthen ethical standards and accountability, while at the same time promoting cross-border data sharing and joint research initiatives within the EAC.

Sub-Theme 8: Accelerating Regional and Continental Goals through Partnerships and Collaborations

Leveraging multi-stakeholder partnerships and collaborations with various actors, stakeholders and partners is more important than ever for educational transformations and development. The EAC is committed to advancing regional integration and contributing to broader regional and continental development aspirations, including the EAC 7th Development Strategy, EAC Vision 2050, CESA 2026-35, African Union Agenda 2063 and the global Sustainable Development Goals. Achieving these ambitious targets requires strong political will, strategic leadership, multi-sectoral collaboration, and sustained partnerships across governments, private sector actors, civil society, academia, and development partners. While policies and frameworks are in place, implementation gaps often slow progress. Identifying and empowering “champions” – influential leaders, institutions, and networks that advocate, mobilize resources, and drive reforms – can accelerate action. Strengthened partnerships at national, regional and continental levels is thus essential for scaling innovations, sharing best practices, and aligning investments with shared priorities.

Sessions under this theme will provide a platform for showcasing successful partnership models and frameworks for effective collaborations between governments, the private sector, civil society, academia, and development partners. Sessions may identify strategies for leveraging partnerships to mobilize financial and technical resources; discuss mechanisms for aligning EAC strategies with continental agendas and fostering cross-border cooperation; or showcase successful partnerships and champion-driven initiatives that can be replicated across Partner States.

Sub-Theme 9: Advancing Higher Education as a Catalyst for Regional Integration and Knowledge Economy Transformation

Higher education is a strategic pillar for advancing regional integration, economic competitiveness, and sustainable development in the East African Community (EAC). As the region transitions toward a knowledge-based and digitally driven economy, universities play a central role in developing future-ready human capital, fostering innovation, and supporting evidence-based policymaking. This role is increasingly shaped by rapid advances in digital technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), which are transforming teaching, learning, research, and institutional management.

This sub-theme aims to provide a platform to critically examine progress, share best practices, and propose actionable strategies for accelerating the advancement of higher education and its contribution to the EAC integration and development agenda. In general, the session will generate evidence-based dialogue and policy-relevant recommendations to advance the development and advancement of higher education. Specifically, the session seeks to: assess progress in the operationalisation of the EAC Common Higher Education area and harmonization of education systems; Promote alignment of education systems with labour market needs; Enhance research and innovation ecosystems by universities to respond to the dynamic needs of diverse stakeholders; Promote higher education data management in higher education for evidence-based decision-making; Leverage rapid advances in digital technologies, including AI and other emerging technologies in teaching, learning, research and institutional management; and, Foster partnerships and collaborations for enhancing the advancement of higher education.

Session Types

The Conference will be structured to ensure maximum engagement of participants, enabling productive discussions, inspiring innovative thoughts, ideas, encouraging collaboration and action:

- **Pre-conference Workshops:** Delivered on 25th August, the day before the official conference opening, workshops will provide an opportunity for participants to take a deep dive into a sub-theme. Workshops shall be interactive and focus on building a particular skill related to the sub-theme. Parallel sessions will run throughout the day.
- **Keynote Speeches:** Delivered daily, Keynote speeches will cover the sub-themes of the conference. Keynote speeches provide depth of analysis and greater appreciation and understanding of the issues of the conference.

- **Panel Sessions:** Panel sessions will allow conference participants to share evidence and best practices related to a sub-theme. Panel sessions will be comprised of 4-5 individual papers followed by QsA.
- **Roundtable Sessions:** Roundtable Sessions allow conference participants to initiate discussion and problem-solving around a particular issues. Roundtable sessions may provide a short presentation, document, or activity to initiate discussion, but the majority of the session is focused on small group discussion.
- **Policy Dialogues:** Policy dialogues will allow participants to hear from policymakers and stakeholders on relevant actions needed for systemic reforms around the issues discussed.
- **Fireside Chats:** These will be organized occasionally around a hot topic to allow participants to engage and ask questions to the identified presenter.
- **Exhibitions:** An exhibition will be set up for every participating country to share evidence and best practices to allow cross-country learning and sharing from the various education systems.

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

The EACREC2026 invites abstract submissions for pre-conference workshops, individual papers (which will be organised into panel sessions by conference organisers), panel sessions, and roundtable sessions. Each submission must include an abstract and speaker bio(s). Submission details for each submission type are shared below.

To maximise participation in the conference, each individual shall be named as presenting author on only one paper or panel, but may serve as a co-author or non-presenting author or other roles on many other papers or panels. Individuals may serve as a presenting author on a paper/panel and participate in leading a pre-conference workshop.

We particularly encourage submissions that involve East African early career researchers as part of the presentation teams. Multicultural and multidisciplinary studies are further encouraged.

Call for submission extended deadline: Friday 8th May 2026, 23:59 EAT.

Call for submission deadline for IUCEA members: Friday 15th May 2026, 23:59 EAT.

Decisions regarding abstracts will be communicated to authors by **June 5th, 2026.**

Submission Guidelines

Each submission must include an abstract and speaker bio(s). Abstracts must be entered into the Conference submission portal. Submissions must be entered in the portal by 23:59 on Friday, May 8th, 2026. The portal may be accessed at [2nd-EAC-Education-Conference](#).

Abstract Guidelines

Pre-Conference Workshops

Workshops provide a forum for an interactive session that goes beyond presentation to deeply engage participants. Workshops should be hosted by an organisation or at least three individuals. Workshops range from 120 to 180 minutes and will take place the day before the official opening day of the Conference.

Workshop abstracts should be no more than 300 words, which include information on the topic, how the session will be interactive, the session structure, the session title, and alignment with the Conference theme and a sub-theme. Submissions will be evaluated for their alignment with the evaluation criteria below.

Individual Papers

In individual paper sessions, authors present an original paper for 10-minutes followed by audience QGA. Conference organisers group 3-4 papers together in a 60-90-minute paper session and assign a session chair.

Individual paper abstracts must be no more than 300 words in length, which includes a paper title and how the paper aligns with the Conference theme and a sub-theme. Submissions will be evaluated for their alignment with the evaluation

criteria below.

Panel Sessions

Panel sessions are submitted by a group of no less than three and no more than four presenters/authors whose papers focus on a common issue or theme. Panel sessions run for 60-90 minutes and provide ample time for discussion and audience participation.

Panel session abstracts should include an overall abstract of no more than 300 words, which includes a session title, information on the session focus, structure, and alignment with the Conference theme and a sub-theme. In addition, each panel session abstract should include individual paper abstracts of no more than 200 words, plus a paper title. Submissions will be evaluated for their alignment with the evaluation criteria below.

Submissions should name individual presenters as well as a session chair and, if needed, session discussant.

Roundtable Sessions

Roundtable sessions are submitted by an organisation or group of at least 2 individuals interested in initiating discussion on a particular topic in response to a stimulus produced by the presenters/presenting organisation. Roundtable sessions run for 60-minutes, and provide a stimulus (presentation, activity, or document, etc.) for participants to react to as well as space for participant discussion, problem-solving, or engagement.

Roundtable session abstracts should include an overall abstract of no more than 300 words, plus a session title; information on the session stimulus, and a plan for encouraging participant discussion, problem solving, or engagement in small groups. Submissions will be evaluated for their alignment with the evaluation criteria below.

Submissions should name the organisation or individuals (at least 2) who will facilitate the session.

Author Bio Guidelines

Each submission should be accompanied by a bio of no more than 125 words for each presenter. Bios will not be accepted or published for non-presenting authors.

Evaluation Criteria

Conference committee members will review and evaluate each abstract according to the below criteria. Abstract author names will be removed from abstracts before evaluation to ensure fair evaluation. The four evaluation criteria are below:

- 1. Relevance:** Does the abstract directly address the conference theme and chosen sub-theme? Is it relevant to the East Africa context?
- 2. Evidence Grounding:** Is the abstract grounded in evidence, data, or systematic experience as opposed to opinion?
- 3. Clarity and Coherence:** Does the abstract clearly present what questions were asked. what activities were implemented, and/or what will be shared in the presentation?

4. Significance: Does the abstract present an issue or finding that is significant for education policy or practice that it is new, newly applied, timely, etc.?

To fulfil the evaluation criteria above, the Conference Committee encourages all submitters to abide by the following recommendations for abstracts:

- Ensure abstracts demonstrate a clear connection to the overall conference theme and chosen sub-theme.
- Cite references to support claims. Lists of references appended to abstracts will NOT count towards the abstract word limits.
- Use clear and concise language.
- Submit abstracts in English, as English is the official language of the conference.
- Have your abstract proofread before submission.
- Provide sufficient context in your abstract, such as the country(ies) of focus, the level of education addressed, type or period of research, etc.
- Adhere to the specified word count for your submission type. Text beyond the word limit will not be reviewed.
- Avoid overly lengthy titles for your abstract.