EU CONEXUS
European University for Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability

Co-funded by the European Union

Evaluation report PhD Summer Schools

D4.1

WP4 EU-CONEXUS PhD Level Joint Actions

Contractual due date (from GA): M48- 31st of October 2026 Final delivery date: M47 – 30 September 2026
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Dissemination level : public

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Executive summary/abstract:

This report evaluates the four EU-CONEXUS PhD Summer Schools organized under WP4 (PhD Level Joint Actions) between 2023 and 2026: the 3rd edition hosted by SETU (2023), the 4th by UROS in Rostock (2024), the 5th by LRUniv in La Rochelle (2025) and the 6th by FredU in Nicosia (2026). All editions were coordinated by Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest (UTCB), the EU-CONEXUS PhD Level Joint Actions Lead, and combined approximately 50 hours of lectures, workshops and interdisciplinary team work focused on research methodology, scientific communication, transversal skills and, in 2026, the responsible use of artificial intelligence in research.

The Summer School has become firmly established within the EU-CONEXUS doctoral offer. Registrations grew from 28 to 52 students (+85.7%), totalling 148 participants from the nine partner universities and the associated partner Odessa National University (Ukraine), with the 2026 edition bringing together 22 nationalities. Participant satisfaction remained consistently high, ranging from 4.5 to 4.78 out of 5, with an overall average of 4.65/5 (93%).

Participants particularly valued the interdisciplinary group projects, the international networking opportunities and the quality of the organization. Their feedback points to further improvements: more hands-on and PhD-level content, more time for team projects, clearer task guidelines and more balanced daily schedules. Participation across partners also remains uneven, suggesting that targeted dissemination and institutional support could help achieve a more balanced representation across the alliance.

EU-CONEXUS PhD Summer Schools

The EU-CONEXUS PhD Level Joint Actions Work Package aims to develop a European higher education inter-university campus by promoting the establishment of a framework for the implementation of the joint EU-CONEXUS PhD programme, and to develop a common framework for a EU-CONEXUS Doctoral School that provides a coherent vision of doctoral programmes and research activities for PhD students, and to introduce new joint, flexible and innovative curricula for PhD students.

Additionally, through challenge-centered approaches, the work package (WP4) aims to transform doctoral teaching and learning. This includes integrating collaborative education, pedagogical advancements, research, and innovation to enhance critical thinking, creativity, entrepreneurship, and cross-disciplinary skills. The approach encourages collaboration among doctoral students and educators during specialized summer schools.

EU-CONEXUS PhD Summer School 2023

The 3rd EU-CONEXUS PhD Summer School took place between 24-28 of July, in Waterford, Ireland. This edition was hosted by the South East Technological University (SETU) and it was coordinated by Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest (UTCB), the EU-CONEXUS PhD Level Joint Actions Lead.

The 2023 edition gathered **28 students** from across the Alliance and the associated partner Odessa National University (ONU, Ukraine) for approximately **50 mandatory classroom hours and independent study**. These hours included seminars and workshops on **professional development, research communication and leadership,** applying theory and exercises in group of 5-6 students. The overall aim of these activities was to build strong international ties and to raise students' interest in **Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability topics.**

Among the most important **learning outcomes**, the following can be named:

- Enhance the knowledge and practice of scientific and professional communication
- Develop a research profile and apply advanced career development tools
- Develop advanced skills in using social-media resources to disseminate research results
- Design and develop inter and multidisciplinary research projects
- Improve networking skills
- Set up effective research teams

The PhD Summer School schedule consisted in lectures and practical activities organized by **16 EU-CONEXUS facilitators, teachers and staff members**.

Day	Slot	Lecture / activity and topic
Day 1 Mon 24 July	Opening	Welcome speeches
	Opening	Presentation of the EU-CONEXUS Alliance and the opportunities it brings for PhD students
	Main part	"3 minutes' challenge": presentation of PhD research topics; formation of the 6 working groups (extended abstract for the Summer School Booklet, presented on the last day)
	End of day	Lecture: Working and researching in interdisciplinary teams; Developing leadership competences – Leadership and team management

Day	Slot	Lecture / activity and topic
Day 2 Tue 25 July	—	Scholarly communication. Research impact
	—	Culture and creativity – Introduction to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
	—	EU-CONEXUS and European funding opportunities for PhD students
Day 3 Wed 26 July	Half day	Enhancing research visibility and research profiles
	Half day	How to work effectively with your supervisor and advisory committee. Teamwork and collaboration
	Other half day	Practical work: Communication, teamwork and creativity – drafting the extended abstract for the Booklet
Day 4 Thu 27 July (Career day)	—	Social media strategy. Interviewing skills
	—	Kick-start your Career
	—	Learn how to communicate science through art
Day 5 Fri 28 July	—	Stress management techniques and personality – how to improve your skills and feel better
	Main focus	3-minute presentations of the extended abstracts by the 6 working groups

At the end of the Summer School, **satisfaction surveys** were applied to the participants, registering 19 answers which were generally positive, with an overall satisfaction rate of 4.78/5 (95.6%). Most participants found out about the event through various channels and agreed that the summer school was useful. They also indicated that the theoretical and practical components met their expectations, and the interdisciplinary group projects were adequate to their knowledge. Participants expressed satisfaction with the guidance during workshops and the time and space provided for group project development. They also appreciated the final presentation of abstracts. Some suggested improvements include shorter lecture sessions, more interactive programmes, and smaller group sizes to facilitate realistic group projects. Participants also mentioned the need for more practical activities and breaks during long lectures. Overall, the majority enjoyed the experience, would recommend the summer school to others, and provided valuable feedback for future improvements, demonstrating the success and value of the programme.

Conclusion:

Concluding the 3rd EU-CONEXUS PhD Summer School:

- **Success in Diversity:** The 2023 Summer School brought together 28 students from partner universities and from the associated partner ONU, promoting international collaboration and knowledge exchange.
- **Comprehensive Learning**: The curriculum covered professional development, research communication, leadership, and interdisciplinary project development, enhancing participants' skills.
- **Key Outcomes**: Participants gained skills in communication, research profile development, social media use, project design, networking, and team coordination.
- **Diverse Facilitation**: 16 facilitators, teachers and staff members enriched the learning experience.
- **Engaging Activities**: Active engagement was promoted through interactive and group activities.
- **Positive Feedback**: Overall, participants found the programme useful, meeting expectations, and appreciated effective guidance.
- **Areas for Improvement:** Suggestions included shorter lectures, more interactive programmes, smaller group sizes, practical activities, and breaks during lectures.
- **Recommendation and Enjoyment:** Most participants enjoyed the experience, would recommend it, and offered feedback for future improvement.

Dissemination:

A comprehensive dissemination strategy was implemented for the 3rd edition of EU-CONEXUS, combining multiple communication channels, including the EU-CONEXUS website, social media, targeted email communication, and dedicated dissemination activities such as PhD Week. In addition, current and former participants were actively encouraged to promote the programme within their academic and professional networks. This multi-channel approach contributed significantly to increasing the programme's visibility, reaching relevant target groups, attracting new participants, and ultimately enhancing the overall success and impact of the initiative.

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- https://www.eu-conexus.eu/en/2023/08/02/eu-conexus-partners-from-south-east-technological-university-hosted-the-3rd-edition-of-our-phd-summer-school/
- https://www.eu-conexus.eu/en/events/phd-week/
- https://www.eu-conexus.eu/en/events/phd-summer-school-2023/
- https://www.facebook.com/eu.conexus/posts/pfbid02gCy9w8Jijcq1FyTbZMbnxa5uojZfKH4Vcsz9rwRRaWwi8Kn5WEtp8pCn76tnc485l
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EU-CONEXUS PhD Summer School 2024

The 4th EU-CONEXUS PhD Summer School on “Interdisciplinary Research Methods and Communication” took place between 22nd -26th of July 2024, in Rostock, Germany. This edition was hosted by Rostock University (UROS) and it was coordinated by Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest (UTCB), the EU-CONEXUS PhD Level Joint Actions Lead.

The 2024 edition gathered **30 students** from across the the Alliance plus the associated partner - Odessa National University from Ukraine, bringing together **16 different nationalities** into a space of knowledge and cultural diversity. The Summer School activities included approximately **50 mandatory hours of classroom and independent study**, during which the participants were assigned to interdisciplinary **working teams of 5-6 students**.

For this edition of the PhD Summer School, the organizing team designed the following **learning outcomes** for the participants:

- Design, apply and critically evaluate qualitative and quantitative research methods appropriate to complex scientific questions.
- Produce and disseminate high-quality scientific outputs, including peer-reviewed publications, tailored to academic and professional audiences.
- Critically assess and integrate ethical, cultural and societal dimensions throughout the research process, ensuring responsible and inclusive research practices.
- Communicate complex scientific concepts, methods and findings effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences using appropriate formats and channels.

The PhD Summer School schedule consisted in lectures and practical activities organized by **12 EU-CONEXUS facilitators, teachers and staff members**.

Day	Slot	Lecture / activity and topic
Day 1 Mon 22 July	Morning	Welcome address and introduction to EU-CONEXUS
	Morning	"3-Minute Challenge": PhD students present their research topics; formation of 5 working groups to find a common interdisciplinary topic and write an abstract of a review article, presented on the last day
	Afternoon	Lecture: Navigating academic publishing and peer review
	Evening	Barbecue at IBZ Rostock
Day 2 Tue 23 July	Morning	Lecture: The role of research in promoting open science and best practices in scientific communication
	Morning	Practical work: writing abstracts and summaries
	Afternoon	Lecture: Career development
	Afternoon	Lecture: The importance of communication skills
	End of day	Guided city tour of Rostock
Day 3 Wed 24 July	Morning	Lecture: Effective communication in science
	Morning	Practical work: drafting and refining abstracts and summaries (best abstracts considered for conference presentations)
	Afternoon	Lecture: Qualitative and quantitative research methods – emerging techniques in data analysis and interpretation
Day 4 Thu 25 July	Morning	Lecture: Career development in academia and beyond
	Morning	Workshop: Engaging with policymakers and stakeholders in research
	Afternoon	Visit to Rostock City Hall: international relations and green mobility initiatives
Day 5 Fri 26 July	Morning	Lecture: Communicating complex ideas to non-specialist audiences – creating a digital communication strategy
	Morning	3-minute presentations of the group abstracts, with feedback
	End of day	Boat trip to Warnemünde and visit to the Leibniz Institute for Baltic Sea Research

At the end of the PhD Summer School, **satisfaction surveys** were applied to the participants, registering 20 answers. The feedback from participants of the PhD summer school highlights both positive experiences and areas for improvement. Participants appreciated certain engaging lectures, the opportunity to network, and the focus on interdisciplinarity was positively noted, providing a valuable opportunity to explore diverse perspectives and research methodologies. However, they also expressed concerns about repetitive content, lack of dietary accommodations, limited time for practical work, and insufficient organization for presentations and team-building activities. Recommendations for future sessions include diversifying lecture topics, improving food options, providing clearer instructions, and incorporating more

interactive and practical sessions to better meet the varied needs of both early and advanced PhD students. Overall, the feedback from participants of the PhD summer school was largely positive, reflecting a valuable and enriching experience, willing to recommend it to the other PhD students as well.

Conclusion:

Key Conclusions from the 2024 EU-CONEXUS PhD Summer School:

Focus on Interdisciplinary Research and Transversal Skills. The 2024 EU-CONEXUS PhD Summer School underscored the critical role of interdisciplinary research methodologies and effective communication for advancing smart urban coastal sustainability. In addition to research methods, there was a strong focus on transversal skills, such as scientific writing, stakeholder engagement, and networking, which are crucial for students' academic and professional development.

Diverse Participation and Collaborative Learning Environment. The Summer School brought together 30 students from 16 different nationalities across 9 universities, plus an associate partner, Odessa National University from Ukraine. This diverse cohort fostered a collaborative learning environment, allowing participants to engage with international experts and explore various research fields, enhancing both their knowledge base and professional networks.

Feedback on Structure and Content. Participants found the Summer School to be a valuable and enriching experience, particularly appreciating the engaging lectures and the opportunity to network. However, they suggested improvements in lecture diversity, food accommodations, practical work time, and clarity of instructions for activities. The overall feedback was positive, with many participants willing to recommend the program to others.

Dissemination:

The dissemination strategy for the 4th edition of EU-CONEXUS was important to its success and impact, using a range of communication channels, including the EU-CONEXUS website, social media platforms, and personalized email campaigns. Additionally, the organization of the PhD Week dissemination event played a significant role and not at least engaging past participants to refer friends and colleagues further increased the program's visibility.

The dissemination and outreach strategy implemented for the 4th edition of EU-CONEXUS contributed significantly to enhancing the programme's visibility, reach and overall impact. A multi-channel approach was adopted, combining communication through the EU-CONEXUS website, social media platforms and targeted email campaigns aimed at relevant academic communities and potential participants. The organization of the PhD Week dissemination event further strengthened stakeholder engagement by providing a dedicated opportunity to present the programme and interact directly with prospective applicants. In addition, former participants were actively encouraged to act as programme ambassadors by recommending the initiative within their academic and professional networks.

- https://www.eu-conexus.eu/en/2024/08/13/interdisciplinary-cooperation-for-the-sustainable-protection-of-our-coasts-the-eu-conexus-phd-summer-school-2024/
- https://www.eu-conexus.eu/en/university-of-rostock-will-host-the-2024-edition-of-our-phd-summer-school/
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- https://www.linkedin.com/posts/eu-conexus_euconexus-phd-summerschool-activity-7221463131342925824-T4zS?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop

EU-CONEXUS PhD Summer School 2025

The 5th EU-CONEXUS PhD Summer School focused on **Interdisciplinary Research Methodology and Communication for Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability** , took place between 21st -25th of July 2025, in La Rochelle, France. This edition was hosted by La Rochelle University and it was coordinated by Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest (UTCB), the EU-CONEXUS PhD Level Joint Actions Lead.

The topic selected highlighting the importance not only of Research methodology but also of transversal skills and networking to advance their academic and professional careers. Students had the opportunity to engage with international experts, fostering connections in diverse research fields.

The 2025 edition gathered **38 students** from across the 9 universities within the EU-CONEXUS alliance plus the associated partner - Odessa National University from Ukraine, bringing together **19 different nationalities** into a space of knowledge and cultural diversity. The Summer School activities included approximately **50 mandatory hours of classroom and independent study**, during which the participants were assigned to interdisciplinary **working teams of 4-6 students**.

For this edition of the PhD Summer School, the organizing team designed the following **learning outcomes** for the participants:

- Research Methodology – Develop a structured and logical research design aligned with the aims and objectives of a PhD thesis
- Critical Thinking – Apply critical thinking skills to identify and evaluate the assumptions and limitations in scientific research
- Data Analysis – Acquire knowledge of key techniques for collecting, organizing, and analyzing data specific to your discipline.

- Scientific Communication – Develop the skills to write clear, concise, and impactful academic papers.
- Oral Presentation Skills – Demonstrate the ability to create and deliver engaging, well-structured research presentations.
- Scientific popularization – Gain awareness of strategies to increase the visibility and impact of your publications.
- Interdisciplinary and Collaborative Communication – Develop skills for teamwork and communication in interdisciplinary research settings.
- Entrepreneurship and Innovation – Develop entrepreneurial skills and innovation mindset.
- Project development skills - Learn how to develop a research project and find resources.
- Career Planning – Reflect in strengths and areas for improvement and develop a career plan.
- Stress management and mental health – Gain tools to improve your reaction in different situations.

The PhD Summer School schedule consisted in lectures and practical activities organized by **25 EU-CONEXUS facilitators, teachers and staff members**.

Day	Slot	Lecture / activity and topic
Day 1 Mon 21 July	Morning	Welcome address and introduction to EU-CONEXUS
	Morning	"3-Minute Challenge": PhD students present their research topics; formation of 7 working groups to find a common interdisciplinary topic and write an abstract of a review article, presented on the last day
	Afternoon	Lecture: Scientific writing and publishing – structuring and writing high-impact research papers
	Evening	Social gathering at Comptoir O Tapas
Day 2 Tue 22 July	Morning	Lecture: Versatility in academic communication – from peer-reviewed publications to TED talks without compromising credibility
	Morning	Lecture and practical work: Building strong review articles for publication
	Afternoon	Lecture: The socio-economic dimension of sustainable development
	End of day	Guided city tour of La Rochelle

Day	Slot	Lecture / activity and topic
Day 3 Wed 23 July	Morning	Lecture: Career planning, resilience and wellbeing
	Morning	Practical work
	Afternoon	Lecture: Intercultural communication in multi-national teams
Day 4 Thu 24 July	Morning	Lecture: Interdisciplinary research methods using contemporary tools
	Morning	Practical work
	Afternoon	Lecture: Engaging with stakeholders while developing projects
	Afternoon	Free time
Day 5 Fri 25 July	—	Presentation of students' work
	Afternoon	Free time and boat tour

At the end of the PhD Summer School, **satisfaction surveys** were applied to the participants, registering 34 answers. Participants found the PhD Summer School to be a valuable and useful experience. The theoretical and practical components generally met their expectations, while the interdisciplinary group projects provided a meaningful opportunity for knowledge exchange. Most attendees expressed satisfaction with the guidance offered during the workshops and appreciated the time and space allocated for teamwork. The final group presentations were positively received, and the event as a whole was described as well-organized and professionally conducted.

Participants suggested several improvements to enhance the programme.
They expressed concerns about the time and space offered for the team to develop the group projects, they also recommended replacing the literature review task with a project proposal or a more practical research project, as some felt that writing a review article without the guidance of an experienced expert was problematic. In addition, certain lectures were considered too basic, more suitable for master's level than for PhD students. To improve outcomes, it was proposed that students genuinely motivated to write a paper be selected and supported through continuous mentorship. Clearer guidelines regarding tasks, their duration, and expected outcomes were also requested. Furthermore, participants advised starting the writing process earlier in the program and suggested adjusting the daily schedule by beginning sessions later in the day, rather than extending from early morning to evening.

Overall, the feedback from participants of the PhD summer school was largely positive, reflecting a valuable and enriching experience, willing to recommend it to the other PhD students as well.

Conclusion:

Key Conclusions from the 2025 EU-CONEXUS PhD Summer School:

Focus on Interdisciplinary Research and Transversal Skills. The 2025 EU-CONEXUS PhD Summer School underscored the critical role of interdisciplinary research methodologies and effective communication for advancing smart urban coastal sustainability. In addition to research methods, there was a strong focus on transversal skills, such as scientific writing, stakeholder engagement, and networking, which are crucial for students' academic and professional development.

Diverse Participation and Collaborative Learning Environment. The Summer School brought together 38 students from 19 different nationalities across 9 universities, plus an associate partner, Odessa National University from Ukraine. This diverse cohort fostered a collaborative learning environment, allowing participants to engage with international experts and explore various research fields, enhancing both their knowledge base and professional networks.

Feedback on Structure and Content. Participants found the Summer School to be a valuable and enriching experience, particularly appreciating the engaging lectures and the opportunity to network. However, participants recommended replacing the literature review with a more practical project and ensuring expert mentorship for research tasks. They also suggested clearer guidelines, earlier initiation of writing activities, and more advanced, PhD-level lectures. Additionally, adjusting the daily schedule to start later was proposed for better engagement.

Dissemination:

The dissemination strategy for the 5th edition of EU-CONEXUS was important to its success and impact, using a range of communication channels, including the EU-CONEXUS website, social media platforms, and personalized email campaigns. Additionally, the organization of the PhD Week dissemination event played a significant role and not at least engaging past participants to refer friends and colleagues further increased the programme's visibility.

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- https://www.eu-conexus.eu/en/2025/07/30/la-rochelle-universite-hosted-the-5th-edition-of-the-eu-conexus-phd-summer-school/
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- https://www.linkedin.com/posts/eu-conexus_we-are-excited-to-share-with-you-more-activity-7305150623694348289-GLkQ/

EU-CONEXUS PhD Summer School 2026

The 6th EU-CONEXUS PhD Summer School focused on **AI for Impact: From Smart Tools to Ethical Decision-Making,** took place between 13st -17th of July 2026, in Nicosia, Cyprus. This edition was hosted by Frederick University and it was coordinated by Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest (UTCB), the EU-CONEXUS PhD Level Joint Actions Lead.

The topic selected providedan interdisciplinary academic experience exploring the opportunities, applications, and ethical implications of artificial intelligence. Students had the opportunity to engage with international experts, fostering connections in diverse research fields.

The 2026 edition gathered **52 students** from across the 9 universities within the EU-CONEXUS alliance plus the associated partner - Odessa National University from Ukraine, bringing together **22 different nationalities** into a space of knowledge and cultural diversity. The Summer School activities included approximately **50 mandatory hours of classroom and independent study**, during which the participants were assigned to interdisciplinary **working teams of 6-8 students**.

For this edition of the PhD Summer School, the organizing team designed the following **learning outcomes** for the participants:

- Develop and strategically expand international and interdisciplinary research networks to support advanced research collaboration and career development;
- Identify, critically assess and mitigate ethical risks arising throughout the research process, applying appropriate principles of research integrity and responsible research practice;

- Critically evaluate and apply AI methods and tools relevant to contemporary research, assessing their suitability, limitations and implications for specific research contexts;
- Anticipate, analyse and address ethical challenges associated with the use of AI in research, including issues related to transparency, bias, accountability and responsible use;
- Critically assess the role of AI in generating scientific, societal and economic impact, and integrate impact considerations into research design and dissemination;
- Demonstrate and further develop advanced transferable skills, including scientific communication, collaboration, critical thinking, problem-solving and research leadership, applicable within and beyond academia;
- Formulate appropriate follow-up actions and professional development priorities to support the progression, quality and impact of their doctoral research.

The PhD Summer School schedule consisted in lectures and practical activities organized by **25 EU-CONEXUS facilitators, teachers and staff members**.

Day	Slot	Lecture / activity and topic
Day 1 Mon 13 July	Morning	Welcome address and introduction to EU-CONEXUS; welcome words
	Morning	"3-Minute Challenge": PhD students present their research topics; formation of 7 working groups to find a common interdisciplinary topic and write an abstract of a review article, presented on the last day
	Afternoon	Workshop: Research with Integrity in the Age of Generative AI – A Manifesto Workshop
	Evening	Visit to CYENS Centre of Excellence; networking event at The Hide, Nicosia
Day 2 Tue 14 July (Excursion)	—	Visit to Ayia Napa; welcome by representatives of Ayia Napa Municipality
	—	Tour of the traditional Country House Museum, with clay-making activity
	—	Visit to the Thalassa Museum
	Rest of day	Networking and social activities at Nissi Beach
Day 3 Wed 15 July	—	Workshop: How to write scientific manuscripts using AI (LaTeX AI Agent)
	—	Workshop: Green Campus
	—	Lecture: Impact of AI-supported learning analytics on ethical educational decision-making
	—	Lecture: Integrating AI in life sciences
	End of day	Practical work, followed by a guided city tour
Day 4 Thu 16 July	Morning	Lecture: Proper use of artificial intelligence in research – opportunities, risks and responsible practices

Day	Slot	Lecture / activity and topic
	After lunch	Lecture: AI for building foundation models
	After lunch	Workshop: European research funding
	Afternoon	Practical work by teams
	Evening	Networking, cultural and social activities at Platonos Student Residences
Day 5 Fri 17 July	Morning	Lecture: Critical AI literacy and the politics of AI
	Rest of day	Presentation of students' work
	Afternoon	Closing ceremony: certificates of participation and awards for best presentations

At the end of the PhD Summer School, **satisfaction surveys** were applied to the participants, registering 45 answers. Participants regarded the PhD Summer School as a highly valuable and rewarding experience. The combination of theoretical input and practical activities successfully met participants' expectations, while the interdisciplinary group projects fostered meaningful collaboration and knowledge exchange. Attendees expressed high levels of satisfaction with the guidance provided throughout the workshops and appreciated the dedicated time allocated for teamwork and collaborative learning. The final group presentations were well received, reflecting the quality of the participants' work and engagement. Overall, the Summer School was recognized as a well-organized, professionally delivered event that offered both academic value and an enriching collaborative experience.

Overall, participants expressed an exceptionally high level of satisfaction with the PhD Summer School, frequently describing it as an excellent academic and intercultural experience and commending the quality of the organization, lecturers, programme, and networking opportunities. Many respondents stated that they would not change anything, highlighting the professionalism of the organizing team and the balance between academic, social, and cultural activities. **The recommendations** provided were primarily aimed at further enhancing an already successful programme. The most common suggestion was to increase the number of practical, hands-on workshops on AI applications, research software, advanced research tools, grant writing, and responsible AI use, while reducing the proportion of lecture-based sessions.

Participants also called for more interactive activities, discussions, debates, mixed-team collaboration, and additional time for group projects, networking, and exchanging ideas. Several respondents recommended making learning materials available in advance through a shared repository, providing clearer communication regarding programme logistics and presentation requirements, and ensuring greater alignment between lectures and the overall theme. Other suggestions included broadening the disciplinary scope by incorporating more content relevant to social sciences, qualitative research methods, and the environmental impact of AI, as well as offering more advanced sessions for experienced researchers while keeping lectures accessible to participants from diverse academic backgrounds. A few practical recommendations concerned accommodating dietary requirements, providing more free time and cultural visits, and improving logistical information. One participant also highlighted the importance of fostering critical thinking during collaborative work by encouraging participants to engage more critically with AI-generated outputs rather than relying on them uncritically. Collectively, the feedback suggests that future editions could build on the programme's strong theoretical foundation by placing even greater emphasis on experiential learning, interdisciplinary collaboration, and participant engagement.

Conclusion:

Key Conclusions from the 2026 EU-CONEXUS PhD Summer School:

- **Focus on Responsible and Impactful AI in Research.** The 2026 EU-CONEXUS PhD Summer School underscored the critical role of artificial intelligence in reshaping research, higher education, and society, while also developing the critical skills needed to use AI responsibly and effectively. In addition to research methods, the programme fostered ethical decision-making, international collaboration, and intercultural exchange, reinforcing the importance of combining technological innovation with academic integrity, sustainability, and societal responsibility to maximize AI's positive impact in research and beyond.
- **Diverse Participation and Collaborative Learning Environment.** The Summer School brought together 52 students from 22 different nationalities across 9

universities, plus an associate partner, Odessa National University from Ukraine. This diverse cohort fostered a collaborative learning environment, allowing participants to engage with international experts and explore various research fields, enhancing both their knowledge base and professional networks.

- **Feedback on Structure and Content.** Overall, participants were highly satisfied with the structure and content of the PhD Summer School, describing the programme as well-balanced, relevant, and professionally organized. The combination of lectures, workshops, networking activities, and cultural events was widely appreciated, while the interdisciplinary approach and diversity of topics were regarded as major strengths. Although some participants suggested improving the alignment of certain lectures with the central theme and reducing the intensity of the daily schedule, the overall consensus was that the programme successfully met its educational objectives and provided a valuable learning experience.

Dissemination:

The dissemination strategy implemented for the 6th edition of EU-CONEXUS contributed significantly to the programme's visibility, reach and overall impact. A multi-channel approach was adopted, combining communication through the EU-CONEXUS website, social media platforms and targeted email campaigns aimed at relevant academic communities and potential participants. In addition, the organization of the PhD Week dissemination event provided a dedicated opportunity to promote the programme and engage directly with prospective participants. Former participants were also encouraged to act as programme ambassadors by recommending the initiative to colleagues and peers within their academic and professional networks, further broadening its outreach and strengthening its visibility among the target groups.

- https://www.eu-conexus.eu/en/for-students/studies/phd-summer-school/
- https://www.facebook.com/profile/100063618326746/search/?q=summer%20school

- https://www.facebook.com/eu.conexus/posts/**Call-for-Applications-EU-CONEXUS-PhD-Summer-School-2026**-nicosia-cyprus%EF%B8%8F-1317-jul/1560494989414430/
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- https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1DSecKYhcC/?mibextid=wwXIfr

Registration Trends Overview

The data (Table 1) reveal a strong and sustained increase in student participation over the four editions of the Summer School. Total registrations rose from **28 students in 2022–2023 to 52 students in 2025–2026**, representing an overall increase of 85.7%. While growth was modest between the first two editions (+7.1%), participation accelerated considerably in the following years, reaching 38 students in 2024–2025 (+26.7%) and 52 students in 2025–2026 (+36.8%). This upward trajectory suggests a growing visibility and attractiveness of the Summer School across the alliance.

Table 1. Number of registered students in the different PhD School editions from academic year **2022/2023 to 2025/ 2026**

UNIVERSITY	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025	2025/2026	TOTAL
AUA	2	3	3	5	**13**
KU	3	3	3	4	**13**
LRUniv	2	3	6	15	**26**
SETU	6	5	4	6	**21**
UCV	3	3	5	6	**17**
UNIZD	2	3	3	4	**12**
UROS	3	2	4	3	**12**
FredU	3	3	3	1	**10**
UTCB	3	5	5	7	**20**
ONU	1	1	1	1	**4**
Total	**28**	**30**	**38**	**52**	**148**

The registration dynamics across partner universities reveal an overall positive trend, with most institutions increasing their representation in the Summer School over the four analysed editions. While participation levels varied considerably among partners, the general pattern points to growing institutional engagement and stronger promotion of the initiative within the alliance.

The most notable increase was recorded by LRUniv, whose participation rose from 2 students in 2022–2023 to 15 students in 2025–2026, accounting for 17.6% of all registrations throughout the analysed period. This substantial growth suggests a significant strengthening of the university's involvement and interest in the programme.

UTCB and UCV also demonstrated consistent upward trends. UTCB increased its participation from 3 to 7 students, becoming the third-largest contributor overall, while UCV doubled its registrations from 3 to 6 students. Similarly, AUA gradually expanded its participation from 2 to 5 students, and UNIZD increased from 2 to 4 students, reflecting a steady rise in student engagement.

Several universities maintained relatively stable participation throughout the four editions. SETU, despite minor annual fluctuations (between four and six participants), remained one of the programme's most active partners, contributing 21 students overall. KU also displayed a stable participation pattern, maintaining three participants during the first three editions before increasing slightly in the final year. UROS showed moderate fluctuations without a clear long-term upward or downward trend.

In contrast, FredU experienced a decline in participation during the last edition, decreasing from three participants in previous years to one participant in 2025–2026. ONU remained consistently represented by one participant each year.

Overall, the partner-level dynamics indicate that the Summer School has progressively strengthened its reach across the alliance. The increasing participation recorded by most universities reflects growing awareness of the programme's academic value and its recognition as an important opportunity for doctoral training and international collaboration. At the same time, the uneven distribution of registrations suggests that additional dissemination efforts and

targeted institutional support could further encourage participation from partners with consistently lower representation, contributing to a more balanced engagement across the alliance.

Satisfaction rate

Participant satisfaction (Table 2) remained consistently high throughout the implementation of the programme, with annual satisfaction rates ranging from 4.5 to 4.78 out of 5 (90–95.6%)**.** Following an excellent result in the first edition (95.6%), satisfaction experienced a slight decline over the next two academic years but remained above 90%, indicating that participants continued to evaluate the courses very positively. The 2025–2026 edition marked a strong recovery, reaching 4.75/5 (95%)**,** nearly equalling the highest score achieved since the programme's launch. Overall, the average satisfaction rate of 4.65/5 (93%) reflects a consistently high-quality learning experience and demonstrates the programme's ability to maintain participant engagement while responding effectively to feedback and continuously improving its delivery.

Table 2: Satisfaction rate

Academic year	SATISFACTION RATE (in grades from 1 to 5)	SATISFACTION RATE (in percentage)
2022 - 2023	4.78	95,6%
2023 - 2024	4.6	92%
2024 - 2025	4.5	90%
2025 - 2026	4. 75	95%
Overall satisfaction	4.65	93%

Conclusions

The results demonstrate that participation in the Summer School has grown substantially since its launch, with the latest edition attracting the highest number of participants to date. The steady increase in registrations suggests that the initiative has become increasingly recognised and valued within the alliance.

The data also indicate different levels of institutional engagement. While some universities consistently contributed a relatively stable number of participants, others, most notably LRUniv, significantly expanded their participation over time. This diversity likely reflects differences in institutional size, doctoral student populations, internal promotion strategies, and available funding for mobility.

Overall, the figures point to a successful consolidation of the Summer School within the EU-CONEXUS doctoral ecosystem, accompanied by increasing participation and stronger engagement from the majority of partner universities. At the same time, the persistently low participation from a small number of institutions suggests that further targeted dissemination and support measures could help achieve a more balanced representation across the alliance.