



**AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT**

**ISSAM FARES INSTITUTE  
FOR PUBLIC POLICY &  
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

**CENTER FOR RESEARCH  
ON POPULATION & HEALTH**

**FACULTY  
OF ARTS  
& SCIENCES**

**FutureWORKS**  
COLLECTIVE

## Request for Proposals (RFPs)

### Round 1

## South West Asia and North Africa Future of Work Hub



**IDRC · CRDI**

International Development Research Centre  
Centre de recherches pour le développement international

**Canada**

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Background</b> .....	1
<b>Theme of the Call and Scope of Research</b> .....	2
<b>Submission Guidelines</b> .....	3
<b>Eligibility</b> .....	3
<b>Evaluation Criteria</b> .....	4
<b>Selection Process</b> .....	5
<b>Call Timeline and Project Duration</b> .....	5
<b>Open Access and Data Management Plan</b> .....	6
<b>Useful Links</b> .....	6

# Introduction

The FutureWORKS Collective, funded by the International Development Research Center (IDRC) Canada, is a global network of five regional hubs dedicated to supporting research on the future of work in the Global South. As part of this initiative, the South West Asia and North Africa Future of Work (SWANA-FoW) Hub will contribute to research and advocate for evidence-based policies on employment and work in the SWANA Region, with a major focus on understanding the impact of the transition to low carbon economies and the rise of the digital economy and Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the labor market.

In its first call for proposals, the SWANA-FoW hub invites proposals aimed at understanding **the impact of AI and digitalization of the economy on employment informality, discrimination and equality of opportunities, and social protection programs**. We encourage researchers from all disciplines and fields of study who are interested in studying the subject to apply by **August 31, 2024 (23:59 EEST)**.

The focus of this project is to provide a thorough and coherent understanding of issues and challenges that regional and national labor markets and institutions face with the rise of new employment and work relationships. This understanding should form the basis for innovative solutions, for a more inclusive and equitable work landscape with better social safety nets for all workers.

## Background

The South West Asia and North Africa (SWANA) region, with a population exceeding 493 million, is a prime example of a region undergoing a significant work transformation. Technological advancements, globalization, climate change, and demographic shifts are all contributing to a rapidly evolving work landscape. While these changes present opportunities for economic growth and development, challenges arise. Concerns include potential job displacement due to automation, the need for workforce upskilling and reskilling, and the emergence of new work models that blur the lines between traditional employment structures.

Zooming in, a **pressing** concern is the **widespread** prevalence of informal employment, **estimated to be as high as 65% in the region**. This means a large portion of the workforce lacks formal contracts, benefits, and job security. Understanding the specific characteristics of informality in the region is crucial to designing effective solutions. The **rise of the gig economy** further complicates the picture, as gig employment often lacks social protection benefits. Additionally, a significant portion of platform workers in the SWANA region face challenges like limited mobility, discrimination, and exploitation. There's a need for research on how to establish effective labor regulations that protect these workers.

The region's young population presents both promise and challenges. Equipping this **vast** workforce with the skills needed for the evolving job market, including those in the gig economy,

is crucial. Additionally, ensuring social protection for the millions of informal and gig workers, through comprehensive Universal Social Protection programs, is essential for a just and sustainable future.

## **Theme of the Call and Scope of Research**

The main theme of this RFPs centers on the impact of AI and digitalization of the economy on employment informality, discrimination and equality of opportunities, and social protection. This broad theme encompasses several issues:

- 1. The relationship between technological advancement and employment informality.** This relationship is theoretically bidirectional. On the one hand, the penetration of AI and digitalization of the economy could be a vehicle for economic growth and decent employment opportunities. Remote work opportunities created through technological advancements could also help to overcome some of the barriers to female labor force participation in the region, including inflexible working hours, commuting, or working in mixed-gender workplaces. In practice however, the expansion of the platform and gig economies have led to a shift towards more informality. On the other hand, the high rates of employment informality prevalent in the SWANA region could reduce incentives to invest in the human capital needed to for the adoption of modern technological innovations, and the penetration of AI and the digital economy. Technological transformation combined with the prevalent informality could amplify existing inequalities at the national and regional levels, since formality of employment is a key determinant of inequality in access to opportunities, or it could help reduce some of these inequalities by creating access to work where there previously was none. This complex interconnectedness merits formal investigation to quantify and validate the significance of each of these pathways.
- 2. Challenges in guaranteeing fairness in compensation, equality and equity of opportunities in access to employment, and digital security of users in platform work.** The rapid rise of platform work, characterized by digital intermediaries connecting workers with tasks, presents significant challenges in ensuring fairness in compensation, equality and equity of opportunities in access to employment, and digital security of users. Fair compensation is often undermined by inconsistent payment structures, lack of benefits, and the gig economy's tendency towards precarious employment. Additionally, achieving equality and equity in employment opportunities is complicated by algorithmic biases and barriers that disproportionately affect marginalized groups, thus perpetuating systemic inequalities. Digital security also poses a critical concern, as platform workers frequently face vulnerabilities related to data privacy, cyber threats, and the misuse of personal information. Addressing these multifaceted issues requires comprehensive research that integrates perspectives from economics, social justice, technology, and policy to develop innovative solutions that promote a fair, inclusive, and secure digital labor market.

3. **Dislocation of the labor market and the consequent effect on design and sustainability of social protection programs.** Technological changes brought in by AI and platform economies are redefining employment relationships globally by changing employer-employee relationships, the meaning of a lifetime career, and the locality of work within national boundaries. In the SWANA region, these changes are likely to invert decades-long patterns of intra and inter regional labor migrations, movement of capital, and sectoral investment concentration. This potential new landscape will pose significant challenges to national and regional institutions in designing and sustaining wide reaching and inclusive and fiscally sustainable social protection programs.

Proposals should formulate and address research questions related to at least one, or a combination, of the issues articulated above.

## Submission Guidelines

Submitted proposals should include:

1. The Application form;
2. The Budget form; and
3. A Budget Narrative

Please use the templates provided for both the application form and the budget. Proposals should be concise and focused.

An application that does not contain all three forms is incomplete and will not be considered for funding.

## Eligibility

We welcome applications from a diverse range of qualified institutions and organizations. To be eligible for this call for proposals, applicants must meet the following criteria:

1. Applicants should be not-for-profit institutions and/or organizations with a demonstrable history of conducting high-quality research. This includes but is not limited to universities, research and policy institutions, thinktanks and civil society organizations. Private companies, individuals or natural persons, one-person organizations, and governmental organizations are not eligible for funding.
2. An applicant institution or organization must be based and registered in the following countries: Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Egypt, Georgia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Türkiye, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

3. The FoW Hub encourages the formation of diverse and multidisciplinary project teams, with a strong focus on achieving gender balance within the team. Proposals should demonstrate that the research team has the necessary expertise to effectively conduct the proposed research. At least one team member should possess expertise in gender-inclusive research methodologies.

## Evaluation Criteria

We welcome innovative and ambitious projects that contribute to broadening the understanding of labor markets and the future of work in the SWANA region. The proposed projects should contribute to the general aim of the hub in developing and advocating for inclusive and fair labor market policies. The proposal should show awareness of contextually relevant issues and should aim at studying the impact of labor market changes on vulnerable and marginalized populations in the region, in particular women, young workers, refugees and displaced persons, and migrant workers.

### **The following are the key evaluation criteria:**

- Relevance of research objective, problem statement, and research questions.
- Strength and alignment of project objectives with RFP goals.
- Potential for policy impact.
- Consideration or integration of themes related to gender equality and inclusion in the labor market.
- Soundness of study design and research methodology.
- Rigor and feasibility of the research design and methodology.
- Quality and feasibility of proposed deliverables and timeline.
- Qualifications and experience of the project team.
- Qualifications of implementing institutions and/or organizations (professional expertise and experience, networking with relevant stakeholders, etc.).
- Justification of the project budget.

Only proposals that integrate a strong focus on various vulnerable groups (e.g. gender, displaced and stateless individuals, migrant workers and youth) and/or intersections of these groups will be considered for funding. Proposals must outline novel research projects that directly address the evolving landscape of work in the SWANA region. The research should contribute to shaping a more inclusive and sustainable FoW.

## Selection Process

Following the submission deadline, all proposals will undergo a rigorous review process conducted by the Hub team and independent reviewers. Proposals will be evaluated based on their relevance to the FoW Hub's goals, research methodology, qualifications of the team, and potential impact. Applicants will be notified of the outcome within 4 to 6 weeks following the submission deadline.

Note that the successful submission of a proposal does not guarantee funding or establish any legal entitlement. The decision to fund a project depends on the review of the proposal and assessments of the relevant institutions and/or organizations.

Following the initial selection, there may be a collaborative review phase involving potential applicants and the hub. During this phase, final adjustments to the project proposal and budget may be required to ensure alignment with the Hub grants' standards and requirements. Applicants should be prepared for this possibility and remain flexible throughout the process.

## Call Timeline and Project Duration

- **Submission deadline:**

Proposals should be submitted in one zip file using the [submission portal](#) by **31/08/2024 23:59 Beirut Time (EEST, UTC+3)**. Proposals received after this deadline will not be considered.

- Selected proposals will be notified on the **First week of October 2024**.
- Project start date: **01/11/2024**.
- Project duration: **12 months**.

**Up to four proposals will receive funding, with funding ranging from USD 40,000 to 80,000.**

**An information session with Q&A is scheduled for July 1 at 14:00 P.M. Beirut Time (EEST, UTC+3), during which potential applicants can seek clarification on the RFP and proposal requirements. Interested applicants can register for the session using the following link: [link](#).**

**For any inquiries, please email: [fowhub.swana@aub.edu.lb](mailto:fowhub.swana@aub.edu.lb)**

## Open Access and Data Management Plan

Applicants funded through this program will be expected to comply with IDRC' [Open Access Policy](#) and [Open Data Statement of Principles](#). Selected proposals will be asked to submit a Data Management Plan before final funding approval.

### Useful Links

[Guidelines on Applying for Funding](#)

[IDRC Glossary of Terms related to GEI](#)

[IDRC Equality Statement](#)

[Guidelines on Principles for Research Ethics](#)

[Standard Terms and Conditions for a Grant Agreement](#)

[Guidelines for Developing a Data Management Plan](#)