Request for Proposals (RFPs)
Round 2

South West Asia and North Africa Future of Work Hub

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Introduction

The global conversation on the Future of Work is entering a decisive moment. Quality employment has emerged as the foundation of prosperity, stability, and sustainable development. Governments, international organizations, and the private sector are converging around a shared agenda: to create jobs at scale while ensuring that labor markets can adapt to and benefit from structural transformations in the global economy. Nowhere is this agenda more urgent than in the SWANA region, where overlapping transitions - economic, environmental, technological, and demographic - are reshaping the outlines of work and livelihoods.

Addressing these transformations requires new evidence, deeper regional expertise, and research partnerships capable of shaping policies that support inclusive and resilient labor systems.

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 second call for proposals, the SWANA-FoW hub invites proposals that explore the evolving relationship between technological change, decarbonization, and labor market transformation in the region. We encourage researchers from all disciplines and fields of study who are interested in studying the subject to apply by **31 January 2026 23:59 Beirut Time (GMT+2)**.

The hub seeks proposals that provide a coherent and empirically grounded understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing regional and national labor markets, particularly in light of emerging work models, shifting skill demands, and structural economic change. This understanding should inform innovative, inclusive, and equitable solutions that strengthen social safety nets, promote decent work, and support future-ready labor systems across the SWANA region.

Theme of the Call and Scope of Research

The second round of the SWANA Future of Work (FoW) Hub RFP builds on the momentum of a global policy shift placing job creation, equity, and labor market transformation at the center of sustainable development strategies. This round seeks to generate rigorous, contextually grounded, and policy-relevant research on how three major forces: **1)** the rapid rise of automation and artificial intelligence, **2)** climate transitions, and **3)** evolving labor governance are influencing

employment trajectories in the SWANA region. These forces have the potential to unlock new opportunities, but they also risk deepening structural inequalities if not managed through inclusive and forward-looking strategies.

This call encourages applicants to critically examine how climate transitions and technological change are reshaping labor demand, labor supply, and the institutional fabric of labor markets. It places particular emphasis on understanding how these dynamics can be leveraged to promote decent work, economic inclusion, and equitable development, especially for vulnerable and marginalized populations including women, youth, refugees, displaced persons, and informal workers. Proposals are expected to go beyond descriptive analysis to offer robust evidence and actionable insights that can inform policy, regulation, and investment priorities in the region.

Theme 1: Artificial Intelligence, Automation, and the Future of Work

This call focuses on the impact of artificial intelligence and automation on employment creation and transformation. Rapid technological change is reshaping labor markets globally, altering skill demands, creating new forms of work, and expanding platform-mediated employment. In the SWANA region, these trends intersect with persistent labor market challenges, including high informality and unequal access to economic opportunities.

Within this overarching theme, the call invites research in two key research areas:

The first one is **the transformation of work structures and governance** where research may explore how AI (in particular generative AI), automation, and digital tools are reconfiguring production systems, employment relations, and the governance of work. Studies can examine who benefits and who is excluded, with attention to gendered and class-based disparities, and propose policy strategies to ensure inclusive technological transitions.

The second area investigates **the rise of platform-mediated employment** where platforms offering ride-hailing, freelancing, delivery, and remote services are expanding across the region, often outside formal labor regulation. Research can investigate how these models intersect with informality, the potential for worker representation and social protection, and the ways digitalization can support fair, decent, and accessible employment.

Theme 2: Decarbonization Pathways and Employment Futures

As global energy systems undergo profound transformation, the SWANA region faces both risks and opportunities. Energy transitions lead to sectoral jobs losses, shifts in migration flows, and disruptions in traditional industries. At the same time, they offer potential for employment growth in emerging green sectors and for diversifying economies away from fossil fuel dependence. Understanding the distributional effects of decarbonization, particularly between

oil and gas and non-oil and gas producing countries, is essential for designing just and inclusive transition strategies.

Within this overarching theme, the call focuses on the association between decarbonization and its employment implications in the SWANA region. While global policy discourse assumes a gradual shift toward low-carbon economies, empirical evidence on the pace, depth, and preparedness of such transitions across the region remains limited.

The Hub, therefore, encourages research that establishes baseline facts and explores how regional oil and gas producers, major importers, and energy-dependent economies are preparing for a post-carbon world. Proposals may examine how different decarbonization scenarios influence employment patterns, including job creation, job loss, and sectoral restructuring. Studies should consider strategies for protecting vulnerable groups, enabling reskilling and workforce adaptation, and fostering innovation and green entrepreneurship aligned with sustainable developments goals.

Theme 3: Rethinking Social Contracts and Labor Governance in the Digital Age

As digitalization reshapes labor markets and employment relations, traditional social contracts and governance frameworks are under pressure. In the SWANA region, where informality and institutional fragmentation are prevalent, rethinking labor governance is essential to ensure fairness, resilience, and inclusion.

Within this overarching theme, the call focuses on two key research areas:

In the first one, research may examine how existing labor institutions and social protection mechanisms can evolve to meet the needs of increasingly informal, flexible, and transnational work. As hybrid employment models blur the lines between formal and informal, employee and entrepreneur, new governance frameworks are urgently needed. Studies could explore innovative policy tools such as portable benefits, digital social protection systems, and regional labor agreements.

The second area invites research on how governments, employers, and workers' organizations can reimagine collective representation in a digitized world. Topics may include emerging models of organization among gig and platform workers, experiments in participatory governance, and institutional innovations that can renew the social contract for fair, inclusive, and future-ready work systems.

Across all three themes, the Hub encourages proposals that are empirically rigorous, comparative, and policy-oriented, and that foreground equity, inclusion, and intersectionality.

Studies that connect multiple themes such as the integration of green and digital transitions or the intersection of automation and new labor governance models are particularly welcome. Collectively, these research efforts will contribute to the Hub's overarching mission of advancing evidence-informed policymaking and promoting decent, sustainable, and future-ready labor systems in the SWANA region.

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, think tanks 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.

4. AUB faculty members, academic centers, institutes, and other units at the AUB are welcome to apply. However, to ensure regional representation and alignment with the Hub's mandate, any AUB-led application must be submitted in formal partnership with at least one eligible institution based and registered in the SWANA region. Partnerships should demonstrate meaningful collaboration, including shared research responsibilities, co-creation of knowledge, and joint dissemination plans.

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 objectives, problem statements, 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 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.

N.B.: Applicants are responsible for obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from their respective institutions for any activities involving human subjects, including interviews, surveys, or other forms of data collection requiring ethical clearance.

Call Timeline and Project Duration

- **Submission deadline:**

Proposals should be submitted in one zip file using the [submission portal](#) by **31 January 2026 23:59 Beirut Time (GMT+2).** Proposals received after this deadline will not be considered.

- Selected proposals will be notified on the **First week of March 2026.**
- Project start date: **April 2026.**
- Project duration: **12-18 months.**
- **Funding scheme:**
  - **Seed Grants: Up to USD 30,000**

Suitable for exploratory studies, pilot research, scoping work, or targeted case studies with modest fieldwork and outputs.

  - **Full Research Grants: Up to USD 100,000**

Designed for comprehensive empirical research, multi-country or comparative studies, extensive fieldwork, policy engagement, and robust dissemination plans.

An information session with Q&A is scheduled for December 4 at 12:30 P.M. Beirut Time (GMT +2), during which potential applicants can seek clarification on the RFP and proposal requirements. Interested applicants can register for the session using the following link.

For any inquiries, please email **sn70@aub.edu.lb** and **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