



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

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

**CENTER FOR RESEARCH
ON POPULATION & HEALTH**

**FACULTY
OF ARTS
& SCIENCES**

FutureWORKS
COLLECTIVE

Terms of Reference (ToR)
Early Career Scholars Program
Call for Applications
2026-2027

South West Asia and North Africa Future of Work Hub



Canada

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1. Background

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.

This initiative is particularly crucial given the unique challenges and opportunities facing the SWANA region. The latter, 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. A **pressing** concern is the **widespread** prevalence of informal employment, **estimated to be as high as 65% in the region**. This means a substantial 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 is a significant need for research on how to establish effective labor regulations that protect these workers.

The region's young population presents both promises 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.

Accordingly, this program aims to provide a thorough understanding of issues and challenges that regional and national labor markets and institutions face with the rise of new technologies and global challenges, forming the basis for innovative solutions for a more inclusive and equitable work landscape.

2. Program Overview

The Early Career Scholars Program is designed to support and engage PhD students/candidates or recently awarded PhD scholars in research related to the FoW in the region. The program will be hosted by the SWANA-FoW Hub and will offer participants the opportunity to conduct interdisciplinary research at the **American University of Beirut** for one academic year (two semesters).

In its first call for applications, the SWANA-FoW Hub invites scholars to submit research proposals focused on exploring the intersections and interlinkages between AI, climate change, low-carbon economies, and the future of work and employment in the SWANA region. We encourage researchers from diverse disciplines and fields of study who are interested in applying by **Thursday, April 30, 2026, 23:59 Beirut time (UTC +2)**.

3. Eligibility and Program Duration

Eligible candidates must be:

- PhD candidates or recently awarded PhD scholars in the fields of Computer Science, Data Science, Economics, Public Health, Public Policy, and other related fields.
- Conducting research related to the FoW in the SWANA region, with a focus on the key areas outlined in the introduction.
- Ready to be based in Lebanon for the duration of the program.

4. Application Process

4.1. Application Deadline

Proposals should be submitted as a single compressed folder file through the **submission portal** by **Thursday, April 30, 2026, 23:59 Beirut time (UTC +2)**. Submissions received after the deadline will not be considered for review.

4.2. Required Documents

Applicants are required to submit:

- Curriculum Vitae.
- A motivation statement describing the applicant's interest in joining the program and how their participation will support their academic career. The statement should include a proposal for one working paper related to FoW that the candidate will work on during their residency at the Hub. The paper should have a regional focus, using data from all or a subset of countries in the region. The proposal should clearly outline the research question, the stream of literature the work will contribute to, and the data and methodology that will be used.

- Two letters of recommendation to be emailed directly by letter writers to fowhub.swana@aub.edu.lb.
- Proof of current academic status (e.g., enrollment letter, copy of university degree).

5. Scholar Responsibilities

Selected scholars are expected to:

1. Conduct independent research on the future of work in the SWANA Region.
2. Engage actively with the SWANA-FoW Hub network.
3. Participate in collaborative work with members of the Hub to produce working papers, research reports and policy briefs.
4. Organize and lead one Hub-sponsored event (talk, lecture, or closed-door discussion) in collaboration with the project team.
5. Participate in the general intellectual life of the Institute.
6. Contribute to areas of expertise within the Hub and the Institute.

6. Program Benefits

Scholars will receive:

1. University and Institutional affiliation as Institute Affiliated Scholars.
2. Access to research resources and networks within the FutureWORKS Collective.
3. Mentorship and guidance from SWANA-FoW Hub members.
4. Opportunity to publish and present research findings.
5. Stipend to cover accommodations and living expenses in Lebanon.

7. Selection Criteria

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:

- Relevance and quality of proposed research to the FoW in the SWANA Region.
- Academic background and achievements.
- Potential for contribution to the Hub and Institute's intellectual community.
- Demonstrated interest in policy-relevant research.
- Potential impact of research on understanding and addressing regional challenges.

Short-listed applicants will be notified within 4 to 6 weeks following the submission deadline, and an interview will be scheduled before a final decision is made. 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 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.

8. Program Oversight

The program will be overseen by:

- A Program Advisor will be assigned based on the proposed topic.
- Committee comprising SWANA-FoW Hub members and affiliated faculty.

9. Funding

The approximate budget allocated for the program is 25,000 USD. Covering the following:

- 10,000 USD stipend per semester, to cover living expenses in Beirut.
- 5,000 USD allocated for research expenses, including purchase of equipment, publication fees, conference travel expenses, and other relevant expenses.

10. Evaluation and Reporting

Scholars will be required to:

1. Submit a mid-tenure progress report.
2. Present their research findings at the end of their tenure.
3. Provide a final report detailing their activities, outputs, and contributions to the Hub and Institute.

The program will be evaluated annually to assess its impact and effectiveness in achieving its objectives and contributing to the broader goals of the FutureWORKS Collective.

11. Contact Information

For inquiries about the Early Career Scholars Program, please contact: fowhub.swana@aub.edu.lb.