AI for Digital Finance

Launching the Swiss-MENA Research Network

International Workshop

April 21-23, 2026
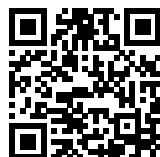
American University of Sharjah
United Arab Emirates

Co-organized by

University of Applied Sciences of the Grisons (FHGR)
Switzerland

American University of Sharjah (AUS)
United Arab Emirates

Supported by
Leading House MENA
Connect & Collaborate Grant

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Swiss-MENA AI Finance Research Network Vision

The Swiss-MENA AI Finance Research Network represents a transformative initiative to establish sustainable collaboration between two of the world's most dynamic financial innovation ecosystems. This network aims to bridge academic excellence with industry practice, creating a platform for continuous knowledge exchange and collaborative innovation in artificial intelligence applications for finance.

Our Mission

To foster interdisciplinary research collaboration between Switzerland and the MENA region, advancing the responsible development and implementation of AI technologies in financial services while addressing the unique challenges and opportunities of both regions.

Strategic Objectives

- **Research Excellence**: Conduct collaborative research that advances the theoretical foundations and practical applications of AI in finance

- **Knowledge Transfer**: Facilitate bi-directional knowledge flow between Swiss precision in financial technology and MENA's rapidly evolving digital finance landscape

- **Capacity Building**: Develop next-generation researchers and practitioners equipped to lead AI transformation in financial services

- **Industry Partnership**: Create sustainable partnerships between academic institutions and financial industry stakeholders

- **Policy Influence**: Contribute to evidence-based policy development for AI governance in financial services

Network Activities

The network will pursue its objectives through:

- Annual workshops alternating between Switzerland and MENA locations

- Joint research projects addressing regional and global challenges

- Researcher and doctoral student exchange programs

- Collaborative funding applications for large-scale research programs

- Industry advisory boards ensuring practical relevance

- Open-access publication of research findings and best practices

Expected Impact

By 2031, the Swiss-MENA AI Finance Research Network aims to:

- Establish 20+ institutional partnerships across both regions

- Produce 50+ joint publications in leading journals

- Secure CHF 5+ million in collaborative research funding

- Train 30+ doctoral students through exchange programs

- Influence policy frameworks in both regions

- Create sustainable innovation pathways for financial technology transfer

This workshop marks the formal launch of this ambitious initiative, bringing together the founding members who will shape the network's trajectory and establish the collaborative frameworks necessary for long-term success.

Welcome Message

Dear Colleagues and Partners,

It is our great pleasure to welcome you to this landmark workshop on AI for Digital Finance, marking the official launch of the Swiss-MENA AI Finance Research Network.

This three-day event represents the culmination of extensive collaboration between our institutions and the beginning of an exciting new chapter in international research partnership. The workshop brings together leading academics, industry practitioners, and policy makers to explore how artificial intelligence is transforming financial services and to establish collaborative frameworks for addressing shared challenges.

The program has been carefully designed to maximize knowledge exchange and partnership formation. Day 1 focuses on research foundations, showcasing the latest academic advances in AI applications for finance. Day 2 bridges to practical implementation, featuring industry case studies and real-world applications. Day 3 looks to the future, with doctoral training, working group formation, and the formal network launch through our MoU signing ceremony.

We are particularly grateful to the Leading House MENA for their support through the Connect & Collaborate Grant, which has made this workshop possible. We also thank our institutional partners, industry sponsors, and all participants who have committed their time and expertise to this initiative.

We encourage you to actively engage throughout the workshop - attend sessions, ask questions, share insights, and most importantly, build connections that will drive future collaboration. The success of our network depends on the relationships formed and strengthened during these three days.

Welcome to Sharjah, welcome to AUS, and welcome to the Swiss-MENA AI Finance Research Network!

Prof. Dr. Joerg Osterrieder   Prof. Dr. Stephen Chan
University of Applied Sciences   American University of Sharjah
of the Grisons (FHGR)   United Arab Emirates
Switzerland

Venue Information

Conference Location

All workshop sessions will be held at the:

Conference Center
American University of Sharjah
University City, Sharjah
United Arab Emirates

Room Allocations

Main Auditorium	Plenary sessions, keynotes, panels
Conference Room A	Coffee breaks and networking
Conference Room B	Lunch and catering
Seminar Room 1	Working group sessions (Day 3)
Seminar Room 2	Working group sessions (Day 3)
Faculty Lounge	Speaker preparation and VIP meetings

Campus Map

[AUS Campus Map]
Conference Center is located in Building M, Ground Floor
Parking available in Lot B (visitor parking)
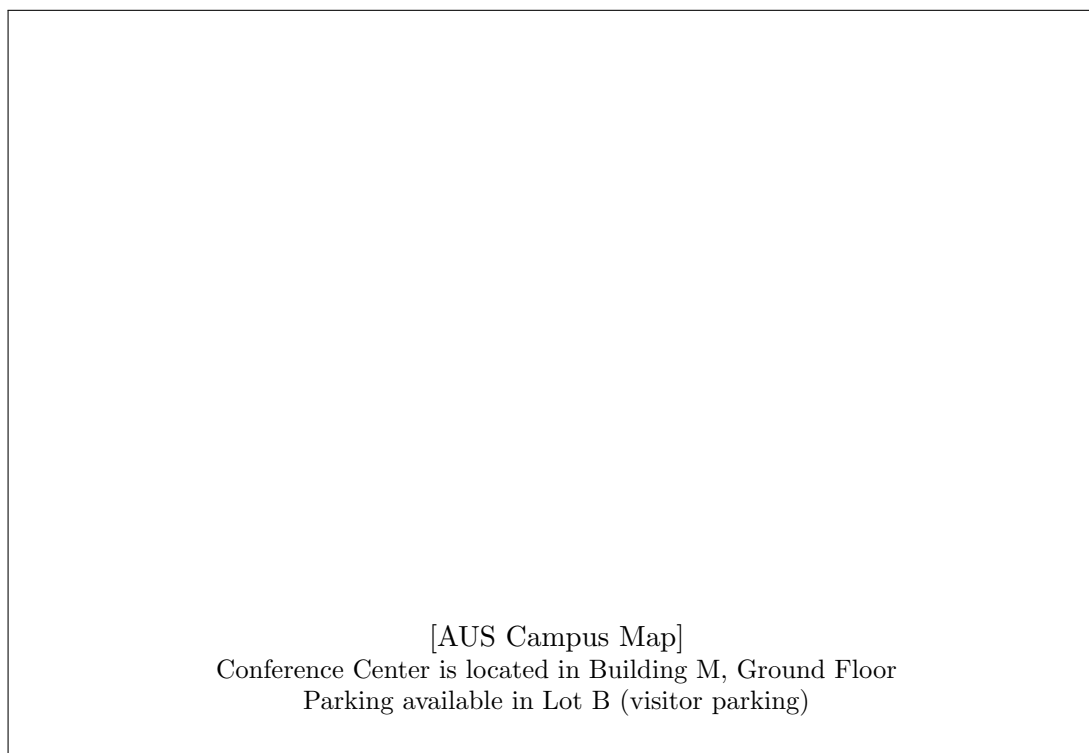
Transportation and Access

- **From Dubai International Airport**: 30 minutes by taxi (approximately 80 AED)

- **From Sharjah International Airport**: 15 minutes by taxi (approximately 40 AED)

- **Parking**: Complimentary parking available in Visitor Lot B

- **Campus Shuttle**: Available between buildings every 15 minutes

Important Contacts

Workshop Secretariat	+971 6 515 XXXX
Emergency (Campus Security)	+971 6 515 5555
IT Support	+971 6 515 2222
Conference Center Reception	+971 6 515 3333

Program at a Glance

Time	Day 1 (Apr 21)	Day 2 (Apr 22)	Day 3 (Apr 23)
	Research Frontiers	*Industry Applications*	*Network Launch*
08:30-09:00	Registration	Welcome Coffee	Welcome Coffee
09:00-09:30	Opening Ceremony	~~Keynote 2~~	Doctoral Training
09:30-10:00	Keynote 1		Workshop
10:00-10:30		Coffee Break	Coffee Break
10:30-11:00	Coffee Break		
11:00-12:30	Research Papers I	Industry Cases	PhD Presentations
12:30-14:00	Lunch & Posters	Lunch & Networking	Lunch & Career Fair
14:00-15:30	Research Papers II	Explainable AI	Working Groups
15:30-16:00	Coffee Break	Coffee Break	Coffee Break
16:00-17:00	Panel Discussion	Industry Roundtable	Network Launch
17:00-17:30	Day 1 Summary	Day 2 Summary	Closing Ceremony
18:00-20:00	Welcome Reception	Free Evening	Farewell Dinner

Day 1: Tuesday, April 21, 2026

Research Frontiers in AI for Finance

08:30 - 09:00   Registration and Welcome Coffee
Location: Conference Center Foyer

09:00 - 09:30   Opening Ceremony
Location: Main Auditorium
Welcome Address - Prof. Stephen Chan, AUS
Opening Remarks - Prof. Joerg Osterrieder, FHGR
Institutional Greetings - AUS Leadership
Workshop Objectives and Structure - Organizing Committee

09:30 - 10:30   Keynote Address 1
Large Language Models in Financial Services: Opportunities and Challenges
Distinguished International Speaker (TBC)
This keynote explores the transformative potential of LLMs in financial analysis, risk assessment, and regulatory compliance, addressing both technical capabilities and implementation challenges.

10:30 - 11:00   Coffee Break and Networking
Location: Conference Room A

11:00 - 12:30   Research Session 1: AI Methods for Financial Markets
Chair: Prof. Stephen Chan, AUS
This session presents recent advances in machine learning applications for market prediction, portfolio optimization, and algorithmic trading, featuring contributions from Swiss and MENA researchers.

- Deep Learning Approaches for Market Prediction

- Reinforcement Learning in Portfolio Management

- Natural Language Processing for Financial Sentiment Analysis

- Neural Network Architectures for Risk Assessment

12:30 - 14:00   Lunch and Poster Session
Location: Conference Room B
Poster presentations by doctoral students and early-career researchers

14:00 - 15:30   Research Session 2: Blockchain Security and Fraud Detection
Chair: Prof. Joerg Osterrieder, FHGR
Building on the organizers' research expertise, this session examines advanced methods for ensuring security and detecting fraudulent activities in blockchain-based financial systems.

- Machine Learning for Blockchain Fraud Detection

- Smart Contract Vulnerability Analysis

- Anomaly Detection in DeFi Protocols

- Privacy-Preserving Techniques in Digital Finance

15:30 - 16:00   Coffee Break
Location: Conference Room A

16:00 - 17:00   Panel Discussion: Research Priorities in AI Finance
Moderator: Senior Academic Leader
Panelists from leading universities discuss emerging research challenges and opportunities in AI applications for finance, identifying priority areas for collaborative investigation.

17:00 - 17:30   Day 1 Wrap-up and Announcements
Summary of key insights and preview of Day 2

18:00 - 20:00   Welcome Reception
Location: Faculty Club
Informal networking opportunity with refreshments

Day 2: Wednesday, April 22, 2026

Industry Applications and Implementation

08:30 - 09:00   Welcome Coffee
Location: Conference Center Foyer

09:00 - 10:00   Keynote Address 2
Digital Transformation in Gulf Banking: An AI Perspective
Senior Executive, Emirates NBD or First Abu Dhabi Bank
This keynote provides regional industry perspective on AI adoption in banking, highlighting successful implementations and lessons learned from digital transformation initiatives.

10:00 - 10:30   Coffee Break and Networking
Location: Conference Room A

10:30 - 12:00   Session 3: Explainable AI for Regulatory Compliance
Chair: DIFC Representative
This session addresses the critical need for transparent and interpretable AI systems in financial services, exploring approaches that satisfy regulatory requirements.

- FINMA Perspectives on AI Governance
- UAE Regulatory Sandbox Experiences
- Interpretable Models for Credit Risk Assessment
- Audit Trails and Model Documentation Standards

12:00 - 13:30   Lunch and Industry Networking
Location: Conference Room B
Structured networking with industry representatives

13:30 - 15:00   Session 4: Digital Banking Innovation Case Studies
Chair: ADGM Representative
Industry practitioners share real-world implementations of AI in digital banking, customer experience, and financial inclusion initiatives.

- AI-Powered Customer Experience Enhancement
- Robo-Advisory Services in Wealth Management
- Financial Inclusion through AI-Driven Microfinance
- Islamic Finance and AI Applications

15:00 - 15:30   Coffee Break
Location: Conference Room A

15:30 - 17:00   Industry Roundtable: From Research to Implementation
Facilitator: Swiss Fintech Leader
Interactive discussion bringing together researchers and practitioners to identify barriers to AI adoption and develop strategies for successful implementation.

17:00 - 17:30   Day 2 Summary and Next Steps
Key takeaways and preparation for network launch

Evening   Free Evening
Optional cultural activities or informal dinners

Day 3: Thursday, April 23, 2026

Capacity Building and Network Launch

08:30 - 09:00   Welcome Coffee
Location: Conference Center Foyer

09:00 - 10:30   MSCA Doctoral Training Workshop
Advanced Machine Learning Techniques for Financial Applications
Instructor: Expert from MSCA Network
Hands-on training session introducing doctoral students to advanced ML methods and tools for financial data analysis, including practical exercises with Python libraries.

10:30 - 11:00   Coffee Break
Location: Conference Room A

11:00 - 12:30   Session 5: Doctoral Research Presentations
Chair: Senior Academic Mentor
Selected PhD students present their research with feedback from senior researchers and industry experts, fostering intergenerational knowledge exchange.

- Emerging Talent Showcase

- Best Paper Award Announcement

- Mentorship Opportunities

12:30 - 14:00   Lunch and Career Fair
Location: Conference Room B
Opportunities for early-career researchers to connect with potential employers and collaborators

14:00 - 15:30   Working Group Formation
Parallel Sessions in Seminar Rooms 1 & 2
Participants self-organize into thematic working groups:

- WG1: Large Language Models and NLP in Finance

- WG2: Blockchain and Digital Assets

- WG3: Risk Management and Compliance

- WG4: Financial Inclusion and Sustainability

15:30 - 16:00   Coffee Break
Location: Conference Room A

16:00 - 17:00   Network Launch Ceremony
Location: Main Auditorium

- Presentation of 5-Year Research Roadmap

- Memorandum of Understanding Signing Ceremony

- Institutional Commitments from Founding Members

- Announcement of Next Workshop (2027)

- Funding Opportunities and Next Steps

17:00 - 17:30   Closing Remarks
Summary by Prof. Joerg Osterrieder and Prof. Stephen Chan
Vote of Thanks - Organizing Committee
Final Announcements

18:30 - 21:00   Farewell Dinner
Location: Traditional Restaurant in Sharjah
Celebration of successful workshop and network launch

Acknowledgments

The organizers gratefully acknowledge the support of:

Primary Sponsor

Leading House for the Middle East and North Africa
HES-SO, Switzerland
Connect & Collaborate Grant Program

Institutional Partners

- University of Applied Sciences of the Grisons (FHGR), Switzerland

- American University of Sharjah (AUS), UAE

- MSCA Industrial Doctoral Network

Supporting Organizations

- Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC)

- Abu Dhabi Global Market (ADGM)

- Emirates NBD

- First Abu Dhabi Bank

- Swiss Fintech Innovation Hub

Organizing Committee

- Prof. Dr. Joerg Osterrieder (Co-chair) - FHGR, Switzerland

- Prof. Dr. Stephen Chan (Co-chair) - AUS, UAE

- Dr. Yuanyuan Zhang - University of Manchester, UK

- Dr. Hana Sulieman - AUS, UAE

mittee members

Scientific Committee

Representatives from participating universities ensuring academic excellence and peer review of contributions.

Local Organizing Team

AUS staff and student volunteers who ensure smooth workshop operations.

Contact Information

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Social Media	#AIFinanceMENA

*We look forward to your active participation in launching
the Swiss-MENA AI Finance Research Network*