
AI for Digital Finance

Swiss-MENA Research Network Workshop

April 23–25, 2026

Hosted by the American University of Sharjah
College of Arts and Sciences — Sharjah, UAE

Organized by

American University of Sharjah

Funded by SERI through the Leading House MENA program (HES-SO) — Grant CCG-2025-05

Foreword

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

It is our great pleasure to welcome you to the **AI for Digital Finance** workshop at the American University of Sharjah. This event represents a milestone in our efforts to build a sustainable research network connecting Switzerland with the Middle East, North Africa, and partners across Europe and Asia.

Artificial intelligence is fundamentally transforming the financial industry — from the way we assess risk and allocate capital to how we ensure transparency and regulatory compliance. Yet the pace of change often outstrips our ability to understand its implications. This workshop aims to bridge that gap by bringing together leading researchers and practitioners to share insights, challenge assumptions, and forge new collaborations.

The Swiss-MENA Research Network, funded by SERI through the Leading House MENA program (HES-SO), was established with a clear vision: to foster meaningful academic partnerships that transcend geographical boundaries. With 13 partner institutions across 10 countries, we have built a vibrant community united by a shared commitment to advancing the science of AI in finance.

Over three days, you will have the opportunity to engage with cutting-edge research spanning Large Language Models, Explainable AI, risk management, blockchain technology, digital banking, and ESG analytics. We encourage you to participate actively, ask challenging questions, and — most importantly — connect with fellow researchers who share your passion.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our local organizers Nerissa Ramos and Saadia Khouyibaba, and to all partner institutions for their continued commitment to this network.

Welcome to Sharjah. We look forward to an inspiring and productive workshop.

Joerg Osterrieder

Prof. Dr. Joerg Osterrieder

Conference Co-Chair, FHGR, Switzerland

Stephen Chan

Prof. Stephen Chan

Conference Co-Chair, AUS, UAE

Yuanyuan Zhang

Prof. Yuanyuan Zhang

Conference Co-Chair, AUS, UAE

Hana Sulieman

Prof. Hana Sulieman

Conference Co-Chair, AUS, UAE

Conference Themes

LLMs in Finance • Explainable AI • Blockchain & DeFi • Risk Management • Digital Banking • Alternative Data & ESG

About the Workshop

The **AI for Digital Finance** workshop brings together researchers from Switzerland, the Middle East, North Africa, and international partner institutions to advance artificial intelligence applications in financial markets. Funded by SERI through the Leading House MENA program (HES-SO), this workshop facilitates cross-regional research collaboration across six key areas of AI in finance.

Over three days, participants will present cutting-edge research, engage in networking activities, and establish collaborative partnerships. The workshop features keynote addresses, invited talks, and contributed research sessions spanning topics from Large Language Models in finance to blockchain technology and ESG analytics.

80+

PARTICIPANTS

5

SESSIONS

3

DAYS

6

RESEARCH TOPICS

13

PARTNER INSTITUTIONS

Key Highlights

- **Keynote address** on AI transformation in MENA financial markets
- **Invited talk** from a leading researcher (speaker TBA)
- **Five research sessions** covering LLMs, Explainable AI, Risk Management, Blockchain & FinTech, and Alternative Data
- **Online participation** on Day 3 for international contributors
- **Networking dinners** all three evenings for collaboration and partnership building

Important Dates

Registration Deadline	March 15, 2026
Workshop	April 23–25, 2026
Venue	American University of Sharjah, UAE



Register Now

Scan or visit the conference website

Who Should Attend?

Researchers, PhD students, and practitioners working at the intersection of AI and finance. Whether your focus is on machine learning, financial regulation, blockchain, or sustainable finance, this workshop offers a platform to present your work and connect with peers from 13 institutions worldwide.

Program at a Glance

Day 1 — Thursday, April 23 (Afternoon)

- 13:00 *Registration & Welcome Coffee*
- 13:30 Opening Ceremony & Welcome Remarks
- 14:00 **Research Session 1: LLMs in Finance**
- 15:30 *Coffee Break*
- 16:00 **Keynote Speaker (TBA)**
- 16:45 Closing Remarks Day 1
- 19:00 **Informal Dinner**

Day 2 — Friday, April 24 (Full Day)

- 09:30 *Registration & Coffee*
- 10:00 **Research Session 2: Explainable AI for Finance**
- 11:30 **Invited Talk (TBA)**
- 12:00 *Lunch Break*
- 14:00 **Research Session 3: Risk Management & Quantitative Finance**
- 15:30 *Coffee Break*
- 16:00 Closing Remarks Day 2
- 19:00 **Informal Dinner**

Day 3 — Saturday, April 25 (Online)

- 09:00 *Registration & Technical Setup*
- 09:30 **Online Session 4: Blockchain, DeFi & Digital Finance**
- 11:00 *Coffee Break*
- 11:15 **Online Session 5: Alternative Data & ESG**
- 12:45 Closing Ceremony & Next Steps
- 19:00 **Farewell Dinner**

Blue = Research sessions/keynotes *Gray italic* = Breaks/registration **Gold** = Social events

Session Format

Each research session runs **90 minutes** with 4–5 contributed talks of approximately 18 minutes each, followed by audience discussion. Sessions cover topics submitted through our Call for Papers. The online sessions on Day 3 accommodate international participants who cannot travel to Sharjah.

Networking Events

All three evenings include dinner events for informal discussions, collaboration planning, and networking with researchers from across the Swiss-MENA network. The farewell dinner on Day 3 features a closing ceremony celebrating the workshop's outcomes and future collaborative plans.

Full program details and speaker profiles:

<https://digital-ai-finance.github.io/digital-ai-in-finance/>

Organization Committee



Joerg Osterrieder

Conference Co-Chair

FHGR, Switzerland



Stephen Chan

Conference Co-Chair

American Univ. of Sharjah



Yuanyuan Zhang

Conference Co-Chair

AUS, Mathematics & Statistics



Hana Sulieman

Conference Co-Chair

AUS, Professor & Assoc. Dean



Nerissa Ramos

Local Organizer

AUS, Mathematics & Statistics



Saadia Khouyibaba

Local Organizer

AUS, Mathematics & Statistics

The workshop is organized by an international team led by four conference co-chairs spanning Switzerland and the UAE. **Prof. Joerg Osterrieder** (FHGR) serves as principal investigator for the Swiss-MENA research network. **Prof. Stephen Chan**, **Prof. Yuanyuan Zhang**, and **Prof. Hana Sulieman** at the American University of Sharjah lead the local organization together with **Nerissa Ramos** and **Saadia Khouyibaba**, ensuring seamless on-site coordination.

Scientific Committee

The workshop is supported by an international scientific committee of over 40 researchers from partner institutions. Committee members contribute to paper review, session chairing, and scientific program design. The full committee list is available on the conference website.

Full committee list and research profiles available at <https://digital-ai-finance.github.io/digital-ai-in-finance/>

Research Topics

The workshop covers six key research areas in AI and digital finance. Five dedicated research sessions address these topics across the three-day program.

1. LLMs in Finance

- Large Language Models for financial text analysis and sentiment
- GPT/LLM applications in banking, investment, and advisory
- Prompt engineering and fine-tuning for financial domains

2. Explainable AI for Finance

- Interpretable models for regulatory compliance and auditing
- XAI for credit scoring and risk assessment
- Fairness and transparency in automated financial decisions

3. Blockchain, DeFi & Digital Assets

- Decentralized finance protocols and smart contracts
- Digital asset markets, tokenization, and CBDCs
- Blockchain security and scalability

4. Risk Management & Quantitative Finance

- AI-driven portfolio optimization and asset allocation
- Machine learning for market risk and credit risk
- Quantitative methods for derivatives and hedging

5. Digital Banking & FinTech

- Digital banking transformation and neobanks
- FinTech innovation and financial inclusion
- Payment systems and open banking

6. Alternative Data & ESG

- Satellite imagery, web scraping, and social media for finance
- ESG scoring and sustainable finance analytics
- Climate risk modeling with alternative data

Interested in Contributing?

Visit our website for submission guidelines and registration information.

<https://digital-ai-finance.github.io/digital-ai-in-finance/>

Venue & Practical Information



AUS Main Campus, University City, Sharjah



Campus grounds with UAE flag

American University of Sharjah

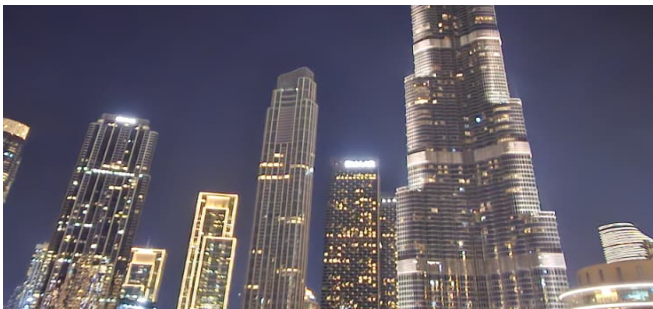
Founded in 1997, AUS is one of the leading comprehensive universities in the Gulf region, offering over 80 undergraduate and graduate programs. The campus spans 260 hectares in University City, Sharjah, and features state-of-the-art facilities for academic conferences.

Getting There

- **Dubai International Airport (DXB):** 30 min by car
- **Sharjah Airport (SHJ):** 15 min by car
- Taxi and ride-hailing services widely available
- Hotel shuttle services from major hotels

About the Region

- Sharjah: UNESCO World Book Capital, cultural capital of the UAE
- Year-round sunshine, April average 32°C
- Visa-on-arrival for many nationalities
- Rich cultural heritage and modern infrastructure



Dubai skyline — 30 minutes from the venue



Hajar Mountains — scenic excursion opportunity

Accommodation

Several hotels are available near the American University of Sharjah. Participants are recommended to book in the Al Majaz or Al Khan areas of Sharjah, or along the Dubai–Sharjah corridor. Detailed travel and accommodation information, including shuttle arrangements, will be communicated to registered participants via the conference website.

Conference website: <https://digital-ai-finance.github.io/digital-ai-in-finance/>

Contact: schan@aus.edu

Partner Institutions

The Swiss-MENA research network comprises 13 partner institutions across 10 countries:

University of Applied Sciences of the Grisons (FHGR)	Switzerland
American University of Sharjah (AUS)	UAE
Renmin University of China	China
Hong Kong Univ. of Science and Technology	Hong Kong
Babeş-Bolyai University	Romania
Bucharest Univ. of Economic Studies	Romania
University of Naples Federico II	Italy
University of Pavia	Italy
University of Calabria	Italy
University of Coimbra	Portugal
Kaunas University of Technology	Lithuania
Kadir Has University	Turkey
UIST Ohrid	North Macedonia

Funding

This workshop is funded by the **Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI)** through the **HES-SO Leading House for the Middle East and North Africa (LH MENA)** under the Connect & Collaborate Grants program.

Grant reference: **CCG-2025-05**

Why Attend?

- Present your research to an international audience of AI and finance experts
- Build cross-regional partnerships with 13 institutions across 10 countries
- Engage with keynote speakers and invited talks from leading researchers
- Network at daily dinners in Sharjah's vibrant cultural setting
- Contribute to a growing Swiss-MENA research community

Register Now — Spaces Are Limited

Visit

<https://digital-ai-finance.github.io/digital-ai-in-finance/registration.html>

or contact schan@aus.edu for more information

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Register by March 15, 2026

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