



# WAIFC YOUNG ACADEMIC AWARD 2026

## *Submission Handbook*

### Abstract

*The Young Academic Award, hosted by The World Alliance of International Financial Centers, invites young academics to submit papers or essays on the future of a sustainable and inclusive financial sector.*

<https://waifc.finance/award/2026/>

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## 1) INTRODUCTION

*The financial sector continues to evolve rapidly, with new technologies enabling digital transformation, innovative trends in artificial intelligence and quantum computing, and a greater focus on financing the net-zero transition, supply chain redesign, and financial literacy & inclusion. While we see the need for a long-term transition towards a sustainable financial industry, we need to support our communities through education and capacity-building while improving diversity, equity, and inclusion in the short term.*



Lamia Merzouki

We are a non-profit association representing 27 leading international financial centers. Our members work with financial institutions, government, academia, and other stakeholders to drive the financial sector's growth and competitiveness. We facilitate cooperation among our members, exchanging best practices and communicating with the public. Together, we collaborate on accelerating sustainable economic growth and innovation in delivering global financial services.

As the Chair of the World Alliance, I am delighted to invite young academic talent to participate in our annual Young Academic Award program. Now in its fifth year, this initiative underscores our commitment to fostering innovation and collaboration between academia and the financial industry. Our award is overseen by a jury representing international financial centers and is increasingly attracting attention from renowned universities and business schools worldwide.

Thanks to their clustering and catalyst effects, financial centers are at the heart of global growth and innovation. By bridging the gap between academia and the financial sector, we can unlock new ideas, drive sustainability, turbocharge value creation, and shape the future of our industry for the better.

We encourage young researchers to submit their work on timely and wide-ranging topics such as sustainability, FinTech, or talent development, to name a few. The winning submissions will be recognized, and a platform will be provided to showcase their research and connect with leading industry professionals.

I look forward to receiving your submissions and meeting the winners in Busan later this year.

Lamia Merzouki  
Chair, Board of Directors

*The global markets and financial system are entering a period of unprecedented transformation. Climate transition, rapid technological change, evolving social expectations and increasing geopolitical complexity are fundamentally reshaping how capital is allocated and how economies grow. In this environment, international financial centers (IFCs) play a uniquely important role. They are more than mere venues for capital flows. They are platforms for innovation, cross-sector collaboration, trust, and long-term economic stewardship in an increasingly complex global landscape.*



*Akshu Campbell-Holt*

*The WAIFC Young Academic Award (YAA) was created to amplify the voices of the next generation of thinkers and practitioners who will help define this future. In its 5<sup>th</sup> year, the 2026 YAA topics reflect the challenges and opportunities that matter most: financing the global transition to net zero, building sustainable and inclusive economic models, governing emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and digital assets, strengthening market infrastructure, navigating geopolitical risk, and ensuring that financial systems remain resilient, ethical, and attractive to future talent. On behalf of the Jury, I encourage young academics to think boldly, cross disciplinary boundaries, and focus not only on what is theoretically sound, but on what is practically achievable.*

We invite young academics to submit papers and essays within the following categories. A full list of topics is available in the subsequent section.

- Climate and Sustainability Finance
- Social Impact and Inclusion
- Digital Finance and Technology
- Talent and Skills for the Future

We will also consider papers on topics relevant to the work of IFCs, even if they are not from the listed topics.

The top three finalists will have a unique opportunity to present their research at our Annual General Meeting in Busan, South Korea, during the week of 14-18 September 2026.

Applications to submit your paper or essay may be made by **30 April 2026**, while your final paper or essay must be submitted by **30 May 2026**. Full details of the competition's eligibility and assessment criteria are included in this handbook. If you have any further questions, please email [award@waifc.finance](mailto:award@waifc.finance).

Akshu Campbell-Holt  
Chair, Young Academic Award Jury

## 2) SUBMISSIONS – HOW TO ENTER

We invite young academics to submit papers or essays addressing one or more of the following topics:

### 1) Climate and Sustainability Finance

- 1.1. The role of international financial centers in financing the net-zero transition
- 1.2. The role of international financial centers in financing the circular economy.
- 1.3. The role of the financial sector in fostering a sustainable blue (maritime) economy and creating biodiversity solutions.
- 1.4. The role of international financial centers in global sustainability reporting interoperability connecting ISSB, ESRS, GRI, and taxonomies.

### 2) Social Impact and Inclusion

- 2.1. How international financial centers can foster diversity and inclusion in the financial industry.
- 2.2. The role of international financial institutions in designing financial products and due diligence methods to promote the growth of social enterprises and social finance.

### 3) Digital Finance and Technology

- 3.1. The impact of agentic artificial intelligence on the financial sector.
- 3.2. The impact of quantum computing on the financial sector.
- 3.3. How can IFCs lead in establishing global tokenized capital markets and competitive regulatory ecosystems to develop digital assets and tokenization of real-world assets?
- 3.4. How will new forms of digital money, such as Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs) and stablecoins, transform payments and banking?
- 3.5. The role of the financial sector in better protecting consumers from fraud.

### 4) Talent and Skills for the Future

- 4.1. How international financial centers can support talent development and re-skilling.
- 4.2. How the financial sector can remain an attractive employer for young talent.

We will also consider papers on topics relevant to the work of international financial centers but not listed above.

## General Submission Criteria, Author Acknowledgement & Permissions

- Papers or essays should be previously unpublished or, if published, not earlier than 2025.
- Multiple authors can contribute to a paper or essay, but at least one author must be under the age of 35 as of 30 May 2026.
- Applicants consent to processing personal data in compliance with EU GDPR.
- Shortlisted applicants agree to provide bios and headshots.
- Shortlisted applicants grant the World Alliance and its members permission to publish author information with paper or essay details as part of the Award social media campaign.

- Shortlisted applicants grant permission to the World Alliance and its members to publish (electronically) their papers or essays with full attribution to the author(s).

### Application for Submission

- Applications for submission must be made by 30 April 2026.
- Applications must be made by completing the [submission form](#).\*
- Applications must include an abstract of between 200 and 500 words and have a table of contents of the entire paper or essay.
- Applications must be in the English language.

**\* If you cannot access the submission form, please email [award@waifc.finance](mailto:award@waifc.finance).**

### Submission of Paper or Essay

- The final paper or essay must be submitted by 30 May 2026.
- Submissions can be uploaded via the submission form or by email to [award@waifc.finance](mailto:award@waifc.finance).
- Submissions must be between 5 and 25 pages (without the bibliography, tables, charts, and pictures).<sup>1</sup>
- Submissions must be written in or translated into the English language.
- Submissions must be in Microsoft Word or PDF format (PDF format preferred).

## 1) WHO CAN ENTER?

We are an international organization, and we aim to make this a global competition. Therefore, we invite young academics from around the world to submit. The Award is open to all countries, including non-World Alliance member countries.

As our focus is on the financial sector, we particularly encourage submissions from students, Ph.D. students, postdocs, or junior professors in finance, economics, mathematics, computer science, or related fields. However, we seek new ideas, so a background in any field of study is welcome as long as your paper or essay relates to finance and meets our submission criteria. Submissions are welcome from those in universities, research institutes, think tanks, and other similar institutions.

Multiple authors can contribute to a paper or essay, but as we seek ideas from bright young minds, at least one author must be under the age of 35 as of 30 May 2025. Authors currently employed by, or collaborating with, the World Alliance or any of its members or observers (refer to the list at the end of this handbook) are not eligible to participate.

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<sup>1</sup> The World Alliance reserves the right to accept slightly shorter or longer papers. Substantially shorter or longer papers will be rejected.

## 2) THE JURY & SELECTION CRITERIA

A jury will conduct a detailed evaluation of submissions. The jury will comprise World Alliance Board Members, its management, and leading academics internationally. Jury members will not be permitted to vote on submissions from their own country to ensure impartiality and fairness.

Submissions will be assessed based on the following criteria:

- Novelty
- Topicality
- Innovative thinking
- Scientific merit
- Relevance for financial centers
- Practical applicability

The jury will decide on the top three finalists. Feedback on submissions will only be provided to the three finalists during their presentations in September. No other feedback or ratings will be provided to submitters. The jury's decision is final.

All applicants will be notified as to whether they have made it through to the top three. Upon notification that you are one of the three finalists, details of our Annual General Meeting in Busan in September will be confirmed.

## 3) DEADLINES & DATES

The website will be open for submissions until 30 May 2026. All submissions will be reviewed and assessed between 1 June and 16 July 2026. Applicants will be notified in July whether they are among the finalists.

Key dates:

- |                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| • 30 April 2026        | Deadline for applications for submission                      |
| • 30 May 2026          | Deadline for submission of full paper or essay                |
| • 16 July 2026         | Jury completes judging/assessing submissions                  |
| • 17-18 July 2026      | Applicants notified whether or not among the finalists        |
| • Late July 2026       | Finalists' travel logistics confirmed                         |
| • 14-18 September 2026 | Presentations at the World Alliance AGM in Busan <sup>2</sup> |

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<sup>2</sup> The World Alliance reserves the right to change the location and date of its Annual General Meeting at its own discretion. If another location or date is selected, the World Alliance will notify the Young Academic Award participants in a timely manner.

## 4) THE AWARDS

The Young Academic Award 2026 will be held at our Annual General Meeting in Busan, South Korea, in September 2026, where the three finalists will be invited to present their submissions to our Board of Directors and other invited member representatives, observers, and guests.

A prize will be awarded to each of the top three finalists as follows:

- EUR €3,000 – 1<sup>st</sup> place
- EUR €2,000 – 2<sup>nd</sup> place
- EUR €1,000 – 3<sup>rd</sup> place

We will cover the cost of economy flights to Seoul or Busan, KTX train tickets from Seoul to Busan (if your flight arrives in Seoul), hotel accommodation for two nights at a hotel chosen by the World Alliance, and other travel expenses as agreed with the three finalists (e.g., visa fees and transfers). Travel logistics will be coordinated with the finalists in July 2026.

***Please note: Only one author per submission will have their travel and accommodation expenses covered by us. If there are multiple authors to a paper or essay, it is up to the authors to decide who will present. If additional authors wish to participate in the presentation and are willing to cover their travel expenses, we will do our best to have them attend.***

To celebrate the winner and two runners-up, all three will be promoted on our website. The winner will also be interviewed for our monthly newsletter.

## 5) TERMS & CONDITIONS

The automated creation of parts of the work using AI applications such as ChatGPT is not explicitly prohibited. However, it must be stated at the end of the work which parts were created automatically.

By submitting an application and a paper or essay, you agree to the following:

- We may share submitted material with our members, the Award Jury, staff, and partners involved in the award process.
- Applicants consent to the processing of personal data in compliance with EU GDPR.
- Shortlisted applicants agree to provide bios and headshots.
- Shortlisted applicants grant our members and us permission to publish author information with paper or essay details as part of the Award social media campaign.
- Shortlisted applicants grant our members and us the permission to publish electronic versions of their papers or essays with full attribution to the author(s).
- If selected as a finalist, you will be able to travel to Busan to present your work in the week of 14-18 September 2026. Participation by video will not be possible.
- The decision of the Jury in selecting the three finalists is deemed to be final.

## APPENDIX – BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The World Alliance of International Financial Centers is a non-profit association registered in Belgium representing 27 leading international financial centers across five continents. Its members are government agencies, associations, and similar institutions that develop and promote their financial centers. The World Alliance facilitates cooperation among its members, exchanging best practices, and communicating with the general public.

For more details, please visit <https://waifc.finance>.

For questions relating to our Young Academic Award, please email [award@waifc.finance](mailto:award@waifc.finance).

### WAIFC Members:

- Abu Dhabi Global Market (ADGM)
- Astana International Financial Centre (AIFC)
- Busan Finance Center (BFC)
- Casablanca Finance City (CFC)
- Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC)
- EnterpriseNGR, Lagos
- FinanceMalta
- Frankfurt Main Finance (FMF)
- Future Finance Poland, Warsaw
- Hong Kong Financial Services Development Council (FSDC)
- Istanbul Financial Center (IFC)
- Jersey Finance
- Luxembourg for Finance (LFF)
- Nairobi International Financial Centre (NIFC)
- Rwanda Finance
- Stuttgart Financial
- The Capital Market Authority of Oman (CMA)
- The Economic Development Board Mauritius (EDB)
- The Qatar Financial Centre (QFC)
- TheCityUK
- Two Rivers International Finance & Innovation Centre (TRIFIC), Nairobi

### WAIFC Observers:

- Bahamas Financial Services Board (BFSB)
- Beijing Financial Street
- Connecticut Hedge Fund Association
- FIBA, Miami
- Scottish Financial Enterprise
- The Strategic Reforms Agency Uzbekistan

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