

High Level Media Brief / IJCAI-ECAI 2026

From August 15–21, 2026, Bremen will host the 35th International Joint Conference on Artificial Intelligence once again organised jointly with the European Artificial Intelligence Association as IJCAI-ECAI 2026. Since its inception in 1969, IJCAI has played a pivotal role as a forum to showcase the frontiers of artificial intelligence research and applications and thus represents the oldest continuously running conference on artificial intelligence. It is widely regarded as a top-tier conference, meaning it is among the most selective and highly respected venues in the field, and the accepted papers are considered among the most innovative and influential in AI research.

Since 2016, [IJCAI](#) has been held annually, with each edition organized in a different host city under the responsibility of a Local Arrangements Committee. For the 2026 edition, the bid to host the IJCAI-ECAI 2026 was won by the committee chaired by Prof. Tanja Schultz of Universität Bremen, Prof. Frank Kirchner of Universität Bremen and German Research Center for Artificial Intelligence (DFKI), and Dr.-Ing. Monika Michaelis of the U Bremen Research Alliance. The work of the Local Arrangement Committee in 2026 is supported by three offices: the U Bremen Research Alliance, German Research Center for Artificial Intelligence (DFKI), and the German Informatics Society (GI).

IJCAI typically attracts over 3,000 participants, offering a scale that safeguards intellectual diversity while remaining compact enough to enable meaningful scientific interaction. It brings together leading technical researchers, university experts, and industry professionals from around the world. In 2026, the conference is held jointly with the European Conference on Artificial Intelligence (ECAI), a major European AI meeting organised under the [European Association for Artificial Intelligence \(EurAI\)](#), a non-profit organisation that promotes AI research and collaboration across Europe. ECAI serves as one of EurAI's flagship events and provides a platform for presenting scientific advances as well as a forum to discuss and disseminate European AI research directions.

IJCAI presents several annual awards that recognize major contributions to artificial intelligence research. The main awards include:

- The **IJCAI Award for Research Excellence** honors researchers for lifetime contributions of outstanding impact in artificial intelligence (e.g., John McCarthy, Geoffrey Hinton, Barbara Grosz, Yoav Shoham).
- The **John McCarthy Award** recognizes mid-career researchers for major scientific contributions that have significantly advanced the field (e.g., Moshe Tennenholtz,

Tuomas Sandholm, Cynthia Rudin). The award is named for John McCarthy (1927-2011), who is widely recognized as one of the founders of the field of artificial intelligence and was established with the full support and encouragement of the McCarthy family.

- The **Computers and Thought Award** is given to outstanding early-career researchers for promising and impactful work in AI (e.g., Terry Winograd, Sarit Kraus and Stuart Russell, Daphne Koller, Fei Fang).
- The **IJCAI Distinguished Service Award** was established to honor senior scientists in artificial intelligence for their lifelong contributions and service to the field. Among the recipients which secured the flourishing of the research collaborations is **Wolfgang Wahlster**, who is best known for his long tenure as Scientific Director and later CEO of the German Research Center for Artificial Intelligence (DFKI). In this role, he helped build one of the world's leading AI research institutions and is widely regarded as a founding architect of modern German AI infrastructure, linking academic research, industrial applications, and national AI strategy.

AI in Bremen

AI in research and application in the State of Bremen stands for a responsible and socially embedded approach to developing and applying artificial intelligence. Across the region, research institutions, universities, and companies pursue innovative AI approaches with a strong emphasis on open science, sustainability, and democratic values. This approach is reflected in Bremen's academic AI landscape, which combines strong fundamental research, interdisciplinary collaboration, and close links to real-world applications.

At the core of Bremen's academic AI ecosystem is the University of Bremen¹ with its interdisciplinary research focus Minds, Media, Machines². Bringing together around 400 researchers across eight departments, this initiative advances research in areas such as robotics, machine learning, data science, social media, and mobile communication. Here, AI research is particularly strong in attracting competitive third-party funding and is anchored in a broad portfolio of coordinated projects and research structures. These

¹<https://www.uni-bremen.de/en/>

²<https://minds-media-machines.de/en/>

include the DFG research units LifespanAI³ and ComAI⁴, the DFG Collaborative Research Center EASE⁵, the DFG Research Training Groups CAUSE⁶, HEARAZ⁷ and

KD2School,⁸ the Biosignals-HUB⁹ project, and numerous other nationally and internationally funded research activities.

Bremen is also home to major research activities of the German Research Center for Artificial Intelligence (DFKI)¹⁰, including the Robotics Innovation Center¹¹ and the CyberPhysical Systems¹² department. The Robotics Innovation Center focuses on application-oriented AI research in fields such as autonomous systems and robotics in challenging real-world environments, supported by unique test infrastructures including a Maritime Exploration Hall and a Multifunctional Hall with an artificial crater landscape. The research department Cyber-Physical Systems develops intelligent, networked systems for applications in production, logistics, and complex technical infrastructures with a strong focus on safety, security and reliability. In addition, DFKI and the University of Bremen jointly operate the team B-Human¹³, one of the most successful teams worldwide in the RoboCup Humanoid Soccer League.

Beyond core AI research, Bremen's AI landscape is characterized by its strong integration into application domains of high societal relevance, including health¹³, materials science¹⁴, and marine and environmental research¹⁵. This breadth reflects the close interaction between AI and domain sciences across the region's research institutions.

Collaboration across institutions is a defining feature of Bremen's AI ecosystem. University of Bremen and the federal and state funded non-university research institutions are closely collaborating within the framework of the U Bremen Research Alliance¹⁶. Across these activities, particular emphasis is placed on the development of trustworthy

³ <https://lifespanai.de/>

⁴ <https://comai.space/en/>

⁵ <https://ease-crc.org/>

⁶ <https://rtg-cause.github.io/>

⁷ <https://www.hearaz.de/en/home/>

⁸ <https://www.kd2school.kit.edu/>

⁹ <https://www.uni-bremen.de/csl/projekte/aktuelle-projekte/biosignals-hub>

¹⁰ <https://www.dfki.de/en/web>

¹¹ <https://robotik.dfki-bremen.de/en/startpage>

¹² <https://www.dfki.de/en/web/research/research-departments/cyber-physical-systems>

¹³ <https://b-human.de/index.html>

¹³ <https://www.bips-institut.de/en/index.html>, <https://www.mevis.fraunhofer.de/>

¹⁴ <https://www.ifam.fraunhofer.de/en.html>, <https://www.iwt-bremen.de/en/home>

¹⁵ <https://www.awi.de/en/>, <https://leibniz-zmt.de/en/>

¹⁶ <https://www.bremen-research.de/en/>

AI, including reliability, usability, privacy, and sustainability. Dedicated transfer structures and innovation hubs¹⁷ further support the translation of research results into practical applications, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises.

AI in Germany

The Network of German Centers for AI applications and research (AI Competence Centers¹⁸) comprises six research institutions: BIFOLD, DFKI, MCML, LAMARC,

ScaDS.AI Dresden/Leipzig and the TUE.AI Center.¹⁹ DFKI has research departments all over Germany.²⁰ The collaboration between the national centers for AI creates synergies based on intensive knowledge and research result exchange, as well as the implementation of joint activities with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as well as large industrial companies (cf. the Industry 4.0²¹ program). In addition to cooperating with the French national artificial intelligence research program, the network of national AI actively promotes international networking. Based on cutting-edge, closely connected research, the network of national AI centers for application and research is a fundamental pillar for developing future-oriented AI technologies in Germany.

The AI strategy of the German government²² ensures that AI research produces tangible economic and social benefit. The Federal Ministry of Research, Technology, and Space (in German: Bundesministerium für Forschung, Technologie und Raumfahrt, BMFTR) uses project funding to provide targeted stimuli to specific research fields. The German High-Tech Strategy²⁴ of the Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, for instance, provides support for AI startups. Furthermore, the network Robotics Institute German is funded by BMFTR.²³ Other networks exist for health as well as climate and energy. Measures aimed specifically at SMEs support the practical application of research results by SMEs in particular.

¹⁷ <https://digitalhubindustry.de/en/>

¹⁸ <https://ki-zentren.net/en/>

¹⁹ <https://www.dfki.de/web/qualifizierung-vernetzung/netzwerke-initiativen/ki-kompetenzzentren>

²⁰ <https://www.dfki.de/en/web/about-us/locations-contact>

²¹ <https://www.dfki.de/en/web/applications-industry/fields-of-application/industry-40>

²² https://www.bmftr.bund.de/EN/Research/EmergingTechnologies/ArtificialIntelligence/artificialintelligence_node.html ²⁴ https://www.bundeswirtschaftsministerium.de/Navigation/DE/Themen/themen.html?cl2Categories_LeadKeyword=hightechstrategie

²³ <https://robotics-institute-germany.de/de/>

In the DFG funding initiative Clusters of Excellence²⁴ there is one special cluster funded which is dedicated to AI, namely Reasonable AI at TU-Darmstadt.²⁵ However, in other clusters of excellence, AI also plays major roles. At other universities, numerous AI professorships with different dedications have been established. Other dedicated measures provide targeted funding for young AI researchers (e.g., Emmy Noether Program,²⁶ AI Talent Program²⁷). There are local AI organizations and networks focusing on applications and research (e.g., KI-Bundesverband,³⁰ hessian.ai,²⁸ Plattform Lernende Systeme (PLS)²⁹ to name just a few).

As a summary, the following picture on various dimensions of AI activities in Germany emerges:

Basic research: Conducted mainly at many German universities, at DFKI, Max-Planck-IS, and university AI labs. Funded by DFG, BMFTR and state programs.

Technology-transfer & prototyping: Through AI-Innovation Hubs (e.g., PLS), Digital Innovation Hubs, and Industry-led Future-Tech Labs (High-Tech Strategy).

Scale-up & market entry: Federal AI Strategy's AI-Competence Centers and regional AI Hubs de-risk projects for industry; KfW Innovationsfonds and private VC provide growth capital.

Talent & standards: AI-Talent Program, KI-Bundesverband, and Plattform Lernende Systeme ensure a skilled workforce and trustworthy deployment.

International amplification: German consortia lead many EU Horizon Europe AI projects, linking national efforts to the broader European AI ecosystem.

²⁴ <https://www.dfg.de/en/research-funding/funding-initiative/excellence-strategy>

²⁵ <https://hessian.ai/projects/reasonable-ai-rai/>

²⁶ <https://www.dfg.de/en/research-funding/funding-initiative/ai-initiative>

²⁷ <https://www.daad.de/en/the-daad/intersecting-dimensions-topics/digitalisation/artificial-intelligence/> ³⁰

<https://ki-verband.de>

²⁸ <https://hessian.ai>

²⁹ <https://www.plattform-lernende-systeme.de/map-on-ai.html>

IJCAI Organizers

U Bremen Research Alliance

The University of Bremen and thirteen federal and state financed non-university research institutes cooperate within the U Bremen Research Alliance. A strong university promotes strong non-university research institutions, and strong non-university research institutions stimulate university development. The U Bremen Research Alliance follows this principle. It is a fractal image of the German research landscape and an example of a cooperation network between universities and non-university research institutions in the German science system.

The Alliance includes research institutes of the four major German science organizations, i.e. Fraunhofer Institute for Digital Medicine MEVIS, Fraunhofer Institute for Manufacturing Technology and Advanced Materials IFAM, Fraunhofer Institute for Wind Energy Systems IWES, Helmholtz Association (Alfred Wegener Institute, Helmholtz Centre for Polar and Marine Research (AWI), German Aerospace Center (DLR) – Institute of Space Systems, German Aerospace Center (DLR) – Institute for the Protection of Maritime Infrastructures, German Aerospace Center (DLR) – Institute for Satellite Geodesy and Inertial Sensing), Leibniz Association (Leibniz Institute for Prevention Research and Epidemiology -BIPS, Leibniz Centre for Tropical Marine Research (ZMT) GmbH, Leibniz-Institute for Materials Engineering – IWT, German Maritime Museum – Leibniz Institute for Maritime History) and Max-Planck-Society (Max-Planck-Institute for Marine Microbiology), as well as the German Research Center for Artificial Intelligence (DFKI).

The cooperation in the U Bremen Research Alliance extends over the four scientific HighProfile Areas “Marine, Polar and Climate Research”, “Material Sciences and Production Engineering”, “Health Sciences” and “Minds, Media, Machines” and thus literally “From deep sea to outer space”.

German Research Center for Artificial Intelligence (DFKI)

The German Research Center for Artificial Intelligence (DFKI) was founded in 1988 as a non-profit public-private partnership. It has research facilities in Kaiserslautern, Saarbrücken, Bremen, Lower Saxony (Oldenburg and Osnabrück) and Darmstadt, laboratories in Berlin and Lübeck, and a branch office in Trier. In the field of innovative

commercial software technology using Artificial Intelligence, DFKI is the leading research center in Germany.

Based on application oriented basic research, DFKI develops product functions, prototypes and patentable solutions in the field of information and communication technology. Research and development projects are conducted in 29 research departments, ten competence centers and eight living labs.

DFKI is actively involved in numerous organizations representing and continuously advancing Germany as an excellent location for cutting-edge research and technology. Far beyond the country's borders DFKI enjoys an excellent reputation for its academic training of young scientists.

German Informatics Society³⁰

The Gesellschaft für Informatik e.V. (GI) unites computer scientists to promote inclusive, scientifically sound digitalisation, seeking unifying solutions and staying open to new ideas. Members from academia, industry, administration, and civil society pose critical questions and drive forward a common-good-oriented discipline. GI, founded in 1969, is the largest German-speaking CS society with > 17 000 individuals and ≈ 250 corporate members. With 14 specialist fields, 30+ regional groups and numerous expert circles, GI serves as the primary platform and voice for all computer-science domains. One of those domains is covered by the Artificial Intelligence Chapter of GI³¹ (FBKI, in German: Fachbereich Künstliche Intelligenz) is the host of all activities within the German Informatics Society that are related to Artificial Intelligence or some of its subfields. In general, FBKI supports relevant initiatives and activities on research and education in the field of artificial intelligence in Germany. Recent work on research and development in AI from all of FBKI's special interest groups and task forces is presented at its annual conference "Künstliche Intelligenz" (KI). The special interest groups organized in FBKI covers major scientific topics in AI research, ranging from declarative knowledge representation to computational architectures based on pretrained embedding and generation functions. Agentic systems, social mechanism design with aspects such as human-compatible behavior of agents (included trustworthiness and explanation), as well as human alignment and cognition are well covered.

³⁰ <https://gi.de/en>

³¹ <https://fb-ki.gi.de/en/>
