

Call for Research

Towards an Inclusive and
Sustainable Future for Work(ers)
in Eastern and Southern Africa.

Updated: 14/06/2024

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Introduction

The [Southern Centre for Inequality Studies](#), the [Centre for Researching Education and Labour](#) and the [International Labour Organisation](#) are pleased to announce a ***Call for Research Towards an Inclusive and Sustainable Future for Work(ers) in Eastern and Southern Africa***. This call is part of a global research project supported by the [International Development Research Centre](#), through the FutureWORKS Collective. The FutureWORKS Collective is made up of five regional research hubs across Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. In Eastern and Southern Africa, our objective is to develop a network of leading research institutions, engaged in cutting-edge and rigorous research, to support labour policies and skills interventions toward a Just Transition.

In this first round of calls, we will offer grants of up to **ZAR 1,000,000** to conduct original research on economic transformation, labour markets, social reproduction, or a related field. We encourage interdisciplinary proposals that promote gender equity and inclusion, including in the constitution of research teams. Proposals must be submitted in English by **July 14, 2024, at 22:59 SAT/23:59 EAT** via the [online platform](#). We will hold an information session on **June 12, 2024, at 2pm SAT/3pm EAT**. Please register for the information session [here](#) and send any questions to us at #Dept-Info.SCIS@wits.ac.za.

Background and Context

The Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) region is undergoing a demographic boom characterised by high birth rates and increased life expectancy. There are currently 580 million people living in the ESA region, with those of working-age constituting the bulk of the population. Every day, 35,000 new workers enter the labour force. This number is expected to double by 2050. While most of the working-age population still lives in rural areas, a rapid process of urbanisation is taking place, putting an additional burden on governments to provide adequate infrastructure, services, and jobs (UNICEF, 2023).

Employment creation has not been able to keep pace with demographic change and over three-quarters of the region's working-age population currently derive a livelihood primarily from the informal economy. While the agricultural sector still constitutes an important source of livelihood, trends point to a gradual process of deagrarianisation, as the working-age population exits the agricultural sector (Bryceson, 2019). Notably, deagrarianisation has not been accompanied by mass industrialisation (Lopes & Kararach, 2019) and some countries are facing a process of premature deindustrialisation (Tregenna, 2015). While a growing proportion of the working-age population has been absorbed into the services sector, much of the work is in the informal economy, which provides limited opportunities for decent work (Wuyts, 2011).

This stunted structural transformation raises critical questions about the future of work and workers - questions which have only been amplified by the deepening climate crisis. On the one hand, the intensification of droughts and floods means that agriculture has become an

increasingly unreliable source of livelihood (Castel-Branco, 2021). On the other hand, the global shift towards decarbonisation means that carbon-intensive industrialisation is no longer a possibility for ESA. For some scholars, the answer lies in greater state support for small-scale agriculture through land redistribution, agricultural subsidies, and investment in agricultural infrastructure (Patnaik & Moyo, 2011). Others argue for industrial policies that promote the diversification of the productive base, protect infant industries, and cater to a growing domestic market (Lopes & Kararach, 2019). And yet others propose decentring production altogether and refocusing redistribution, with the idea of Universal Basic Income gaining particular traction (Ferguson, 2015).

Ultimately, African governments hope that the global shift towards decarbonisation and digitalisation will offer new opportunities for countries to move up the chain of value addition, increase productivity, and promote decent work (African Union, 2020). To this end, governments have invested substantial resources in developing the institutions and instruments for skills anticipation, assessment, and training (ILO, 2019). However, investments in skills training systems have had little impact because they tend to focus exclusively on the ‘skills mismatch’ and ignore the social and economic factors that shape skill formation systems (Allais, 2022b). While some countries have successfully positioned themselves within global value chains, these have often reinforced their subordinate position in the global economy as sites of extraction for natural resources, cheap labour, and rents (Webster & Masikane, 2020; Castel-Branco, Mutoro & Webster, 2023).

Research themes

The overall objective of this Call for Research is to generate cutting-edge and rigorous research to support labour policies and skills interventions toward a Just Transition.

This first Call aims to explore the nexus between structural transformation, labour markets and social reproduction. We welcome proposals that address the following questions:

1. How is the global transition to a decarbonised and digitalised economy likely to shape pathways for structural transformation and the structure of labour markets in the region?
2. How is the organisation of production in emerging sectors and occupations likely to influence business models, labour processes, conditions of work, and worker power?
3. How are the changing conditions of work likely to impact the terms of social reproduction, the nature of social relations, and gender inequality?
4. How can state policy contribute to a socially inclusive and ecologically sustainable world of work?

For each of these questions, we are interested in understanding how existing vectors of power, in particular gender, shape experiences and distributional outcomes.

In 2026, we will issue a second Call for Research looking at specific aspects of skill formation, work, and social protection.

Methodological considerations

We encourage interdisciplinary proposals that explore both **quantitative and qualitative** aspects of the research questions listed above. Proposals must involve original research. Research teams can focus on multiple countries. Research methods may entail the statistical analysis of official data, discourse analysis of archival materials, an (online) survey or questionnaire, individual or group interviews, ethnographic observation, community-based methods such as performance or photography, data scraping from social media, or any other innovative research method. In the proposal, applicants are expected to outline the rationale for the research methods selected, detail how the research methods will be applied, and explain how the data collected will be analysed.

Furthermore, we encourage proposals that apply a case study approach, which **compares two emerging sectors, industries, or occupations** in detail. The case study approach will enable research teams to explore how economic transformation is reshaping the labour process, conditions of work and terms of social reproduction. By exploring the similarities and differences across sectors, industries, or occupations, the expectation is that research will be able to offer concrete recommendations to ESA states on how to support a socially inclusive and ecologically sustainable world of work. In the proposal, applicants are expected to explain the rationale for case study selection. It is up to the research team to decide on the basis of comparison. Examples include: the same industry in two countries; an industry that will be affected by decarbonisation vs one that will be affected by digitalisation; an industry that is largely formalised vs one that is largely informalised; an industry that is dominated by men vs. one that is dominated by women.

In the proposal, applicants will be expected to explain how they plan to apply a **gender lens** to their research, from the conceptualisation of the research to its operationalisation and the analysis of the research findings. This research should contribute to improving equity, equality, and inclusion. All research conducted under the FutureWORKS Collective: Eastern and Southern Africa will require **ethics** approval by the University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee. In the proposal, applicants will be expected to reflect on the ethical implications of the research, whether the research will expose participants to harm, what measures will be taken to protect participants, and how researchers can secure the necessary permissions.

To ensure coherence of the research across countries and promote peer-learning, the selected research teams will be expected to **actively participate in the research network**, led by the FutureWORKS Collective: Eastern and Southern Africa. Opportunities for participation will include an inception workshop in October 2024, to develop a common conceptual framework; regular meetings every two months to refine the country research approach, share emerging research findings, and plan dissemination events; and online seminars to disseminate final research findings to a wider audience, including researchers, policymakers, civil society groups and trade unions, employers' organisations and business groups, and the media.

Eligibility criteria

We welcome proposals from researchers based at or affiliated with **research institutions based in Eastern or Southern Africa**. Eligible research institutions include public or private universities, independent research centres and non-governmental organisations. Where research teams are composed of more than one research institution, one institution must be designated as the lead responsible for implementing the contractual agreement with the University of the Witwatersrand. Multilateral organisations, government departments, consultancy companies, and for-profit organisations are *not* eligible to apply.

Research teams must be led by a researcher with a **demonstrated track record of producing high-quality research** for policy impact, with a focus on labour markets, conditions of work, social reproduction and/or skills formation systems. The research team must have the capacity to work in English as well as the working languages of the country or countries. The research proposals must show how they will make a meaningful contribution to conceptual, empirical, and policy debates in the ESA region.

Proposals must explicitly outline how the research teams will integrate [the principles of gender equity and inclusion](#) into the research team structure, the research design, and the research process. Furthermore, proposals must meet the ethical standards outlined by the [IDRC](#) and by the University of the Witwatersrand.

Expectations and responsibilities

Research teams must integrate [the principles of gender equity and inclusion](#) in all aspects of their work, from constructing the research team to developing the research design, operationalizing the research and disseminating the research findings. This includes:

- A comprehensive approach to gender equity and inclusion, which aims to address inequalities within the research team, along the lines of gender and other relevant vectors of power.
- An inclusive research design, which recognises the diverse approaches, experiences and outcomes, along the lines of gender and other relevant vectors of power.
- An inclusive data analysis strategy, which includes a gender lens, as well as an analysis of other vectors of power.
- An inclusive approach to disseminating findings, which includes organisations of women and other marginalised groups.

Research must meet the ethical standards outlined by the [IDRC](#) and by [the University of the Witwatersrand](#).

The grant cycle for this first call will run from September 1, 2024, to February 28, 2026, with the disbursement of funds made on the basis of research outputs (see table 1 below). Each research team will be expected to publish:

- a working paper based on original research, in the open-source platform of the University of the Witwatersrand, [Wits WIReDSpace](#);

- an article based on the working paper, for a special issue convened by the research hub, in a peer-reviewed international journal.
- a summary brief in a prescribed format based on the working paper for dissemination to a wider audience

Research teams will also be expected to participate in online seminars and co-organise public engagements, including policy dialogues, as part of research dissemination.

Table 1: Indicative timeline for the disbursement of funds

Tranche	Deliverable	Deadline
25%	Upon signature of the contract	September 1, 2024
25%	Upon submission and acceptance of inception report	November 30, 2024
25%	Upon submission and acceptance of the draft working paper	August 1, 2025
25%	Upon publication of the working paper, submission of the journal article, and summary	December 31, 2025

Research teams will be expected to comply with the [IDRC's Open Access Policy](#) and the [Open Data Principles Statement](#). Applicants must include a [Stage 1 Data Management Plan](#), in the appendix of their application, outlining their approach to managing the research data collected.

Proposal guidelines and structure

Proposals must be submitted in English by **July 14, 2024, at 22:59 SAT/23:59 EAT via the [online platform](#)**. There are two components to the proposal. Part A requires basic information about the researcher(s), the research institution, and the focus of the proposal, including an abstract of a maximum of 250 words. It must be submitted via the form on the online platform. PART B is the proposal, which must be uploaded to the online platform as a word document. The proposal should follow the format below and must not exceed the word limit allocated. In addition to the proposal, applicants must upload a compiled list of all the CVs of the members of the research team, the [Stage 1 Data Management Plan](#) and proof of legal status of the research institution. Please identify each file using the following format: [Country]. [Surname]. [File Type] (For instance, Mozambique.Dhlamini.Proposal).

We will hold an information session on **June 12, 2024, at 2pm SAT/3pm EAT**. Please register for the information session [here](#) and send any questions to us at #Dept-Info.SCIS@wits.ac.za.

Format for the proposal

1. Project background

Title of research proposal	
Name: lead researcher	
Name: leading institution	
Contact: lead researcher	
Research country/ies:	
Proposed cases studies	
Amount requested	

2. Contexts, objectives and research approach

<i>Abstract (max 250 words)</i>
<i>Introduction: the context, the research problem and the approach (max 350 words)</i>
<i>Overall objectives and questions (max 150 words)</i>
<i>Literature review: Contribution to contemporary theoretical, empirical and policy debates (max 600 words)</i>
<i>Research methodology: research approach, rationale for case studies, research methods, sources of data, gender equity and inclusion, and ethical considerations (max 750 words)</i>
<i>Approach to incorporating an intersectional lens in the conceptualisation, operationalisation and dissemination of the research (max 300 words)</i>
<i>Research outputs (max 350 words)</i>
<i>Public engagement strategy (max 500 words)</i>

3. Workplan, which outlines activities and timeline for the duration of the grant cycle.

4. Itemised budget, which clearly defines the costs of:

- Remuneration for members of the research team
- Equipment required to undertake or disseminate the research
- Research costs associated with travel and accommodation.

Evaluation criteria

Complete applications will be evaluated by a committee of reviewers from SCIS, the REAL Centre and the ILO. Applicants will be notified of the outcome by **July 31st, 2024**.

The proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Contribution of the proposed research to conceptual, empirical, and policy debates in Eastern and Southern Africa (35%):
 - Alignment with call
 - Relevance of the topic to the region
 - Original contribution to theoretical, empirical and policy debates
- Coherence of the research design, which provides a clear articulation between the research questions, methodology, research instruments, and sources of data (35%)
 - Clear articulation of the research problem and questions
 - Gender analysis
 - Coherence between the research questions and research design
 - Viability of the research resources and sources of data
 - Ethical considerations
- Public engagement strategy (10%)
 - Effectiveness of public engagement strategy
 - Viability of the strategy given the resources available
 - Evidence of experience engaging stakeholders and policymakers
- Team composition (10%)
 - Demonstrated expertise in the field, with high-quality publications
 - Gender-equitable teams, with a combination of senior and junior researchers
 - Experience in policymaking processes and engagement with stakeholders (government officials, civil society, representatives,
- Quality of the writing (10%)

In selecting shortlisted proposals, the review committee may choose to prioritise proposals that allow for greater geographic and thematic diversity.

Application, submission and review process

As outlined above, proposals must be submitted in English by **July 14, 2024, at 22:59 SAT/23:59 EAT via the [online platform](#)**. We will hold an information session on **June 12, 2024, at 2pm SAT/3pm EAT**. Please register for the information session [here](#) and send any questions to us at #Dept-Info.SCIS@wits.ac.za. The information will be recorded and shared via YouTube for those who are not able to attend. Applicants will be notified of the outcome by **July 31st, 2024**.

Successful applicants will sign a contractual agreement with the University of the Witwatersrand. The anticipated start date is **September 1st, 2024**.

Sources:

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