



The Future of Work(ers) in the global South

The impact of digital technologies in reshaping the world of work(ers) in the global South, and the implications for inequality.

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

INTRODUCTION

The Southern Centre for Inequality Studies (SCIS) at the University of the Witwatersrand is pleased to announce the second round of collaborative seed funding to foster the development of innovative research on the role of digital technologies in reshaping the world of work(ers) in the global South, and the implications for inequality.

The impact of digital technologies on the world of work(ers) and inequality has been the subject of great debate. Some suggest that technological innovation can increase productivity, promote rapid growth, create jobs and improve the delivery of public services. States can play a supportive role by flexibilising the labour market, facilitating upskilling and expanding residual forms of social protection. Others argue that digital technologies have enabled multinational corporations to increase their monopoly power across sectors and geographies, exacerbating a decade's long tendency towards non-standard and informal employment. As the boundaries between production, reproduction and consumption become increasingly blurred, labour, social and consumer protections have become increasingly important.

Much of the debate on the impact of digital technologies on the world of work(ers) has been speculative. Where substantiated by empirical evidence, it has stemmed primarily from the global North. This project focuses on the global South not only because there is a significant knowledge gap but because the global South will possibly be the site of greatest contradiction. Notably, the global South is extremely diverse politically, socially and economically. These historically specific conditions shape how digital technologies are adopted, co-opted or resisted in each context. To capture its heterogeneity and allow for comparative insights, the Future of Work(ers) research project focuses on the following five case countries: **Colombia, Ethiopia, India, Mozambique and South Africa**. Nevertheless, it recognises that relations between the global North and South and within the global South itself are not circumscribed by the boundaries of the nation-state.

This call for proposals builds upon an earlier phase of research that locates debates on digitalisation within a broader analysis of the political economy of labour markets and the role of social protection, both as a buffer to the labour-replacing effects of digital technological change and as a subject of digitalisation in its own right. Our research approach conceives of digital innovation as a contested terrain over what technology is developed, how it is developed, and for what purpose. It is concerned with the differentiated impact of digitalisation on workers' lives, along the lines of race, class, gender, nationality and age. It is particularly interested in how workers have sought to (re)claim control over the process of digitalisation and the conditions of work through new forms of organising and collective action.

WHAT ARE THE RESEARCH THEMES?

This second round of research aims to bring our initial results into dialogue with new research that critically examines the impact of digital technologies on the world of work in five focus sectors: **financial services, mining, manufacturing, agriculture and platform work across any other sector**. Research proposals should contribute to new empirical research or ongoing innovative work related to the countries and sectors listed above. Sector studies should focus on at least **one of the following overlapping themes**:

- **Digital capital and the corporation:** What has been the impact of digitalisation on companies' business models? Has it led to a concentration of corporate wealth and/or enabled the emergence of small and medium enterprises? How have these changes affected the regulatory power of the state? How can states and global governance institutions play a more proactive role in shaping the operations of global digitalised capital?
- **The labour process:** What has been the impact of digitalisation and automation on the restructuring of the labour process? How has restructuring altered the jobs created and the skills required? How have these changes affected the relations of power between workers and capital? How has social dialogue informed responses from capital (e.g. reskilling)?
- **The conditions of work:** What has been the impact of digitalisation on the conditions of work (e.g. security and regularity of employment, wages, social protection, occupational health and safety, collective bargaining, etc.)? To what extent have digital tools and algorithmic management been used to allocate, monitor and evaluate work? How have changes in the conditions of work influenced intra-household relations? How have these changes been mediated by race, class, gender, nationality, age and physical ability?
- **Worker organising:** What has been the response of workers to digitalisation? How have they adopted, co-opted or resisted in specific sectors? How can emerging forms of organising inform our thinking about the nature of collective action and class struggle in an increasingly globalised, financialised and digitalised world?
- **Policy and regulation:** What is the regulatory role of the state and global governance institutions in mediating the terms of digitalisation? How can labour, migrant, social, and consumer protections reduce the adverse effects and expand the progressive possibilities of digitalisation? What are the limits of regulation at the national and global level?

WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO APPLY?

Researchers engaged in new empirical research or ongoing innovative work related to **the countries, sectors, and the research themes listed above are eligible**. Research in other countries of the global South that align with the sectors and research themes of SCIS' Future of Work(ers) project will also be considered. Preference will be given to researchers based at institutions in the global South. We strongly encourage applications from early career researchers, including those completing their PhDs and undertaking post-doctoral research.



WHAT ARE THE EXPECTATIONS?

Researchers who submit successful proposals will be expected to:

- Participate in an **inception workshop, research progress webinars, and a research and advocacy workshop**. Researchers will also be encouraged to attend the Future of Work(ers) monthly **reading circle**;
- Produce at least **one peer-reviewed research report** (working paper), based on original research, that meets academics standards and project timelines;
- Present their research at an **international online workshop** on digitalisation and the Future of Work(ers) hosted by SCIS;
- Contribute to a **journal special issue** on digitalisation and the Future of Work(ers) in the global South;
- Collaborate with SCIS on **media and policy engagement** to disseminate research and influence policy-making, including blog posts, interviews and presentations.

HOW TO APPLY?

- The application form must be completed using the provided link:
<https://forms.CallforProposal.FoW>
- The proposal document must be submitted to #Dept-info.SCIS@wits.ac.za with a clear subject line "Proposal for Future of Work(ers) project and applicant's name". For example, Proposal for Future of Work(ers) project, john_doe

The deadline for proposal submissions has been extended to **7 July 2021**. The Future of Work(ers) research project will host an **information session on 3 June 2021 at 14:00 SAST via Zoom**. Potential applicants are strongly encouraged to attend this session to learn more about the call for proposals and how to apply. For specific questions or to register for the online session, please email #Dept-info.SCIS@wits.ac.za

HOW SHOULD PROPOSALS BE FORMATTED?

The proposals should provide a detailed summary of the research. They should be no more than 4,000 words in Times New Roman, font size 12, 1.5 spacing. Proposals must contain the following information:

- Name, affiliation and contact details of lead researcher
- An abstract (max 250 words)
- A brief empirical and theoretical justification for the project
- A brief problem statement and research questions
- A brief note on the proposed methodological approach
- Project timeline and itemised budget
- A brief two-page CV and list of publications of each researcher (does not count towards the proposal word count)

HOW MUCH FUNDING IS AVAILABLE?

Grants will range from **\$6,000 to \$9,000**, depending on the scope and scale of the project. All expenses directly related to the research can be included in the estimated budget. Research projects must be concluded **by 31 January 2022**.



HOW WILL THE PROPOSALS BE EVALUATED?

Applications will be evaluated by the SCIS Future of Work(ers) Reference Group, based on the criteria:

- Alignment with the broader future of work(ers) research project;
- Quality of research design;
- Relevant experience of the researcher(s);
- Engagement with local institutions in the global South, especially in five focus countries.

Rejected applications may only receive informal feedback on request.

PROJECT TIMELINE

3 June 2021	Online Information session
7 July 2021	Deadline for submission of proposals
15 July 2021	Selected proposals will be announced
28 July 2021	Research inception workshop
24 November 2021	Submission of the draft report
15 December 2021	Feedback from the reference group
31 January 2022	Submission of the final research report
Ongoing collective project activities	Reading group, webinars; progress meetings; capacity building workshops on research and advocacy; annual network meeting, etc.