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Call for Papers for a Special Issue

“Social Policies and Regulation of Work in the Platform Economy”

Guest editors¹: Fabian Beckmann and Fabian Hoose

Background and aim of the special issue

The platform economy is not only changing markets and consumer behaviour radically, but it is also transforming the way work is perceived, controlled, and organized. This development brings a multitude of challenges for labour markets and social security systems, as the forms of work emerging in the platform economy are often inadequately protected by established social policy institutions. This "de-institutionalization" (Beckmann/Hoose 2022) is rooted in the multiple fragmentation of platform work, which ranges from the legal employment status (usually formal self-employment instead of dependent employment) (Mangold 2024) and spatial-organizational aspects such as the "de-companyzation" (Nullmeier 2022) and social isolation of workers to new forms of algorithmic work control (Wood et al. 2019), with unclear consequences for questions concerning labour and social law (e.g. bogus self-employment) (Buendia Esteban 2022). Since platform companies often operate internationally, platform work falls into an "institutional void" (ILO 2021) and poses increased employment-related risks for those engaged in this type of work.

However, approaches to the social policy governance of the platform economy increase both on supranational and national state levels, encompassing both government legislation (e.g. platform tax transparency act) and new forms of social dialogue (such as the Code of Conduct "Principles for paid Crowdsourcing/Crowdworking" set up in Germany). The most ambitious approach is the EU Directive on improving working conditions of platform workers, which was adopted in autumn 2024. This first supranational regulatory instrument worldwide aims to provide platform workers who are falsely classified as self-employed with access to collective labour rights - and thus institutionalized social protection (Piasna 2024; Rainone/Aloisi 2024).

Beyond European efforts, there has been an increasing dynamic in recent years: in Spain, for example, the 'Ley Rider' (Rider Law) was implemented in 2021, a specific law to enforce labour rights for workers of delivery platform services, and in Belgium, a presumption of

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employment for platform workers, which is based on early drafts of the EU Directive, has been in effect since 2023. In Germany, there is discussion about the extent to which platform workers engaged in journalistic and artistic activities could be included in the Artists' Social Insurance Scheme (Hoose/Rosenbohm 2024). At the same time, new and old forms of social dialogue are developing in various European countries, ranging from the anchoring of established actors to platform-specific interest representation (e.g. the trade union Mladi Plus in Slovenia) as well as bottom-up initiatives and self-regulatory approaches (Spasova/Marenco 2023; Beckmann/Hoose 2023).

Against the backdrop of these regulatory and institutional dynamics, the special issue "Social Policies and Regulation of Work in the Platform Economy" focuses on the tension between de- and re-institutionalization processes of work in the platform economy. The special issue wants to stimulate the activities of the newly established Issue Network "Platforms - Work - Regulation", which is supported by the German Institute for Interdisciplinary Social Policy Research (DIFIS) (<https://difis.org/vernetzen/issue-networks/issue-network-plattformen-arbeit-regulierung/>). The Issue Network aims at bringing together interdisciplinary and international research perspectives on work in the platform economy.

The special issue "Social Policies and Regulation of Work in the Platform Economy" is open to all researchers interested in this topic. It addresses researchers in sociology, political science, economics, law, and related disciplines. We welcome theoretical, conceptual as well as empirical contributions, which can be either country-comparative or single-country case studies. The contributions should address questions of social policy governance and regulation of work in the platform economy and can include one or more of the following research questions along the three key dimensions institutions, actors, and processes:

Institutions

- What are the (national) institutional frameworks which platform work falls into in different countries? To what extent are existing labour regulations and social law applied to platform workers?
- What implications arise from the different national labour and social law contexts for the implementation of the EU Directive on Platform Work?
- Which new institutions for the protection of platform workers have developed on (supra-) national levels in recent years? What were the driving forces behind their development?
- What social policy ideas are expressed in institutions aiming at the (social) protection of platform workers? How are workers' protection needs legally deduced and to what extent do they match the empirical protection needs?
- What are the subjects of existing and/or planned regulations? Which types and risks of platform work are (not) addressed by these regulations?

Actors

- What are national governments' positions towards the regulation of platform work in general and towards the transposition of the EU Directive on Platform Work in particular?
- Which actors on (supra-) national levels are engaged in political agenda-setting? What are their motivations and what means do they use? How responsive are national governments and supranational political actors to this agenda-setting?

- What role do established actors like trade unions and employer associations play in the regulation of platform work? What challenges do "traditional" forms of collective organization and interest representation face?
- What new forms of worker representation and regulation are emerging in the platform economy?
- What role do platform workers play as subjects of labour regulation? What working conditions do they face and what preferences and actions for regulation and interest representation arise from this?

Processes

- How do the member states of the European Union transpose the EU Directive on Platform Work into national law? What problems arise in this process and how can the variation between different countries be explained?
- What role do social policy considerations play in the regulation of platform work?
- How inclusive are implementation processes of supranational or national legislation? Which actors are involved? To what extent and why do social inequalities arise in the ability to influence these processes?
- How do platform companies react to existing and/or planned regulations? To what extent are regulatory loopholes identified and strategically exploited? Under which circumstances do platform companies show a willingness to cooperate?
- What effects and outcomes do institutions for the protection of platform workers have? Which groups of platform workers are addressed by these and to what extent do they reproduce a segmentation of protection?
- To what extent are existing regulations in the field of platform work evaluated and adjusted? What lessons can be drawn from this for future good practices?
- What specific aspects of platform work are addressed in regulatory approaches? How does the regulation of platform work also affect other forms of employment?

We also welcome contributions which address complementary questions and place the regulation of work in the platform economy in a broader context - for example, in relation to new forms of non-standard work in the course of digitalization, unpaid forms of work, trends of employment hybridization and multiple job holding, as well as (new and old) grey zones of work. The special issue aims at contributing to the theoretical, conceptual and empirical research on the social policy governance of work in the platform economy and bringing together current research in this field across disciplinary boundaries.

Organisation and timeline

If interested, please submit a proposal (max. 500 words) in English to fabian.beckmann@uni-due.de and fabian.hoose@uni-due.de. The deadline for submission is May 15, 2025. The editors will select a subset of proposals by June 15, 2025, and invite the authors to develop their contributions. Full papers (max. 8,000 words, including bibliography) must be submitted to the journal via ScholarOne (<https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/zsr>) by December 1, 2025. Please consider the journal's guidelines for authors². All contributions will be double-blind reviewed and should be written in English. The publication of the special issue is planned for the second half of 2026. All articles will be published open access. For questions concerning the special issue, please contact the guest editors.

² https://www.degruyter.com/publication/journal_key/ZSR/downloadAsset/ZSR_Instructions_for_authors.pdf

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