

NOT-EQUAL

EPSRC Network+: Social Justice through the Digital Economy

Pilot Projects: Application Form

We are seeking funding proposals from shortlisted candidates for Not Equal's first call for pilot projects. For full guidance please see details of the call on the Not Equal [website](#).

Pilot research projects can be between 6-8 months in length. We expect to fund up to 12 pilot research projects of up to £40k (80%FEC) for this first funding call.

Please submit this form before the deadline of **5pm, 30th April 2019** to notequal@ncl.ac.uk.

Applicants will be advised on the outcome of their proposal by the 30th May 2019.

| GENERAL INFORMATION | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Lead Applicant (PI): Dr Wifak Gueddana</p> <p>Email address: wifak.houij_gueddana@kcl.ac.uk</p> <p>Job Title: Teaching Fellow</p> <p>Department: Digital Economy and Society</p> <p>Organisation: King's College London</p> | <p>Co-Investigators (names and organisations):</p> <p>Dr Kendra Briken, Chancellor's Fellow at University of Strathclyde; Dr James Stewart, Lecturer in Science Technology and Innovation, University of Edinburgh; Prof. Rob Procter, Professor of Social Informatics, University of Warwick; James Ravenscroft, PhD Student, University of Warwick and Chief Technologies Officer @ Filament Consultancy</p> <p>Supporting Partner(s):</p> <p>Duncan McCann and Miranda Hall (New Economics Foundation)</p> <p>Project Title:</p> <p>Who cares?</p> <p>Platform Work and Low-income home service work in the digital economy</p> <p>Project Tagline:</p> <p>An academic and civil society collaboration using workshops and alternative forum data to identify challenges and opportunities for migrant and BAME women and other vulnerable groups using platforms</p> <p>Eol Reference Number: NE106</p> |

1. SUMMARY

Despite the rapid platform takeover of reproductive work, i.e. child and elderly care, domestic work and sex work, there has been little research to date on the way in which the vulnerabilities and opportunities of platform work are shaped by gender, race and class. Public debates on the 'gig economy' have overwhelmingly focused on unicorn startups such as Uber and Deliveroo which have a predominantly male workforce. Yet, in the UK, women make up over half of gig workers (52% Huws et al 2017) and their experiences have been overlooked. This gap critically limits the ability of policy-makers and trade unions or campaigning organisations to understand the economic, social and working conditions of those using platforms and apps to work in the context of broader labour market issues.

There is need for a deeper understanding of how these technologies come to reproduce the rigid gendered and unequal labour markets where the hidden work of migrant and BAME women in low-income home service sectors remains invisible, undervalued, underpaid and under-protected. There is potential for the exploitative dynamics of these sectors to be amplified as, for example, online profiles and rating systems generate new forms of abuse and discrimination (Mateescu and Ticona 2018) or platform mediation enables wage theft and the further erosion of protections (Van Doorn, 2017).

This project brings together a cross-disciplinary research collaboration to provide first empirical insights using an innovative methodological toolbox of alternative forum data and interviews to explore parts of a vulnerable labour force so far hidden in the media hype on the gig economy. Through workshops and policy roundtables we will share our findings and identify key challenges with relevant stakeholders to fuel future grassroots campaigns, inform policy and shape the design of new technologies.

2. HOW DOES YOUR PROPOSAL ALIGN WITH THE THEMES AND OBJECTIVES OF NOT EQUAL?

This proposal focuses on 'Fairer Futures for Business and Workforce' in the realm of care and domestic work, which are increasingly facilitated through platforms (i.e. Helping; Care.com). Since the initial expressions of interest, we have co-designed a project that involves original research on a so far neglected area in the labour market. The dissemination of our findings to different stakeholders will promote fairness and equality in the digital economy and will also give key insights into hidden labour from an intersectional perspective.

Our proposal is driven by the key concern highlighted by Not Equal: that the "careless application of technological innovation has the potential to harm the most vulnerable...and amplify existing forms of injustice." So far, existing research and interventions regarding digital transformations and the future of the labour market have largely overlooked their implications for some of the most vulnerable in society: migrant and ethnic minority women working as carers or domestic workers, increasingly through on-demand platforms or online marketplaces.

A comprehensive understanding of "new forms of socio-economic inequality and exclusion" upon which we can base future interventions and innovations for a fairer digital economy will need to be attentive to the way in which the opportunities and vulnerabilities of digitally mediated work are shaped by gender, race and class.

This research project uses a collaborative and explorative approach combining forum data, computational methods (topic modelling and visualisations), critical analysis of digital transformations in these sectors and the targeted dissemination of our findings to key stakeholders. It will foster cross-disciplinary dialogue by bringing together Studies of Science and Technology (STS), sociology of work,



social informatics, and a third sector organisation with long standing experience working on inequalities, labour markets and the digital economy.

The project also aims to lay the groundwork for new and emerging technologies focussed on solutions for equity not just efficiency. In this sense, the project makes a contribution to exploring the current opportunities of academic institutions in identifying social inequalities and supporting social justice. The collaboration between technology driven and social driven sciences opens a dialogue for future development of more equal use of technologies.

Particularly, the expertise of our non-academic partner in reflecting on more community-based and inclusive uses of platform technologies will help ensure that our findings have maximum impact. The New Economics Foundation are a known convenor across politics, activism and practice, and have a wealth of on-the-ground knowledge to draw on when turning research into action. They will ensure that the findings are disseminated in an accessible and engaging format to key stakeholders and new policy networks.

3. CASE FOR SUPPORT

Twenty years ago, it was fairly safe to assume that the crowds of people pouring through the busy train stations on Monday morning are attending to their office jobs; today all is not what it seems. One in seven workers is self-employed (OECD 2019). Their workplace is where their computer is, in their cars, in their homes, and in cafes and co-working spaces (Barnes 2019). All aspects related to their work have changed, from their employment status, to their working practices, job entitlements, security, social protection and well-being. On-demand apps, social media platforms and online markets in particular, have consolidated the general shift in the world of work, enabling people to stay connected and to manage their timetable, while at the same time working longer hours and losing control over working time. But how does being part of an amorphous mass of on-demand labour in online marketplaces affect our understanding of work? And how does it affect the hidden labour of reproductive work, like care and cleaning?

Understanding gig work requires holistic and intersectional approaches that bring voices of workers and situate their experiences, i.e working practices, grievances and coping strategies, within a broader discussion on technological, social and economic labour market trends and challenges (Hunt & Samman 2019). However, platform work is still both mis-represented and understudied. A handful of 'unicorn startups' stole the limelight, leading researchers to assume that the growth of the gig economy is a feature of platforms that is captured by websites' transactions (platform-centrism) (Kässi and Lehtonvirta 2018). But just as 20 years ago, the focus is predominantly on work done in public spaces (delivery, driving), while the changes in working conditions for the already hidden workspaces of a predominantly migrant, female, black and ethnic minority workforce remain obscured.

Project objectives

- Shedding light on the so far invisibilized labour in the platform economy, focussing on typically 'feminised' labour like cleaning and caring, that is done usually in the clients' home.
- Use alternative online data sources and develop a methodology to enable exploration, mapping and co-production with participants who, otherwise are difficult to reach and engage
- Creating a cross-disciplinary research network including policy and academic partners

Conceptual Argument and Justification



Today there are increasing concerns about the conditions of domestic workers, and care workers, i.e. nannies, nurses, social workers, and their social and economic vulnerability. Reports show that caregivers are often 'underpaid, in many cases less than the minimum wage, and often at levels too low to adequately care for their own families. They are almost universally excluded from coverage by labour laws and usually work without a contract or any kind of agreement, written or oral, with their employers' (NDWA, 2017).

Although similar forms of mistreatment and unfavourable working conditions have become the norm (Huws 2016-2017) -given the withdrawal of welfare state, exclusive outsourcing contracts, the austerity led successive and repetitive budget cuts- what distinguishes domestic workers from, say, retail, hotel, or taxation, is their intimacy with care beneficiaries and the social dimensions of such a reproductive work. The project takes the findings on reproductive labour usually seen as 'women's work' to refer generally to the way in which these forms of labour have historically been gendered/racialized. At the same time, this implies that the project would not expect to focus exclusively on the experiences of women using these platforms, but include all domestic and care workers to find out differences in the way in which they experience access and equality in platform work. Hence, we can understand those sectors in the job economy that are more susceptible to platform takeover and approach the workers who are more vulnerable to algorithmic management, under-protection, exploitation, gender stereotyping and discrimination in all its forms.

Methodology

In this study we seek to resist the dominant platform-centrism and extend the study of platform work beyond the transactional data that can be collected from one website (e.g. Uber transactions, Amazon users accounts, etc.) or the insights resulting from its users' alone (e.g. interviews of Uber drivers). Although case studies and ethnographic research are now established methods to bring out hidden labour and precarious, exploitative working conditions, we still need scalable approaches if we are to attempt any significant mapping across platforms and industries.

It is also important to understand that digital technologies mediate the conditions and practices of reproductive labour. Indeed, workers are often led by website features to accept and carry clients' orders in isolation, limiting their face to face interactions. Yet workers are using technology to combat loneliness and build work communities. Many post online, in fora and social media dedicated pages to seek support, share experiences, and organise. Therefore, it is important that we use their online conversations to echo their voices and understand how they use technology, apps, what kind of problems they experience and what coping tactics they have developed. To do that we will identify a selection of threads in and across fora and social media websites, which we will analyse using a combination of topic modelling, visualisation and interpretive research. This innovative use of forum data will inform the development of a toolbox leading future research on new job/role typologies, working practices and strategies that contribute to our understanding of the gig economy more generally and to implementing solutions and policy recommendations.

4. NOVELTY OF PROPOSAL

Please explain the novelty of the proposed research project (<150 words).

This project is an innovative approach concerning fairer futures of work on three levels.

Firstly, we have chosen to focus on undervalued and 'invisible' reproductive work performed by a largely feminised and immigrant workforce in response to the absence of these sectors from existing academic literature and public debates. The 'Uberization' narrative had focussed on private hire and



logistic/distribution but these are not the only sectors characterized by increasingly precarious and degrading working conditions.

Secondly, the methodology, drawing on alternative sources of evidence that cut across platform boundaries and centres the lived experience of workers, represents a significant departure from the 'platform-centrism' that has dominated digital labour research.

Thirdly, our cross-disciplinary multi-stakeholder collaboration is innovative in that it overcomes the limitations of one specific disciplinary view or policy-led perspective on the challenges of new technologies and equality.

5. NON-ACADEMIC PARTNERS NOW 149! ALL GOOD

This project has been fully co-designed with the New Economics Foundation (NEF) to enable their practice-focussed approach to complement the academic research, fostering knowledge-exchange between different communities.

NEF has an existing work stream looking at digital transformations and 'women's work' which includes developing a typology of new platforms and technologies in the care and domestic work sectors. This will provide our Not Equal pilot with the preliminary groundwork needed.

NEF will convene three workshops with representatives from trade unions and civil society who have influence in this area, based on strong existing relationships. This might include Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX), the Living Wage Foundation, United Voices of the World, Independent Workers Great Britain, Migrants Organise, GBM, Unite Hotel Workers, Kalayaan, the Voice of Domestic Workers. NEF will also collate and disseminate the findings from this research into a short policy pamphlet to be discussed at a policy roundtable.

6. DELIVERABLES AND SOCIAL IMPACT

Outputs:

- 3 x workshops to reflect on findings and reflect gig workers' voices in the project
- 1 x policy roundtable
- 1 x paper published in an academic journal
- 2 x leaflets or short briefings to communicate findings to key stakeholders
- 4 x blogs on the NEF website
- 1 x special episode on award-winning 'New Economics Podcast'
- 2 x articles published in mainstream press outlets

Outcomes:

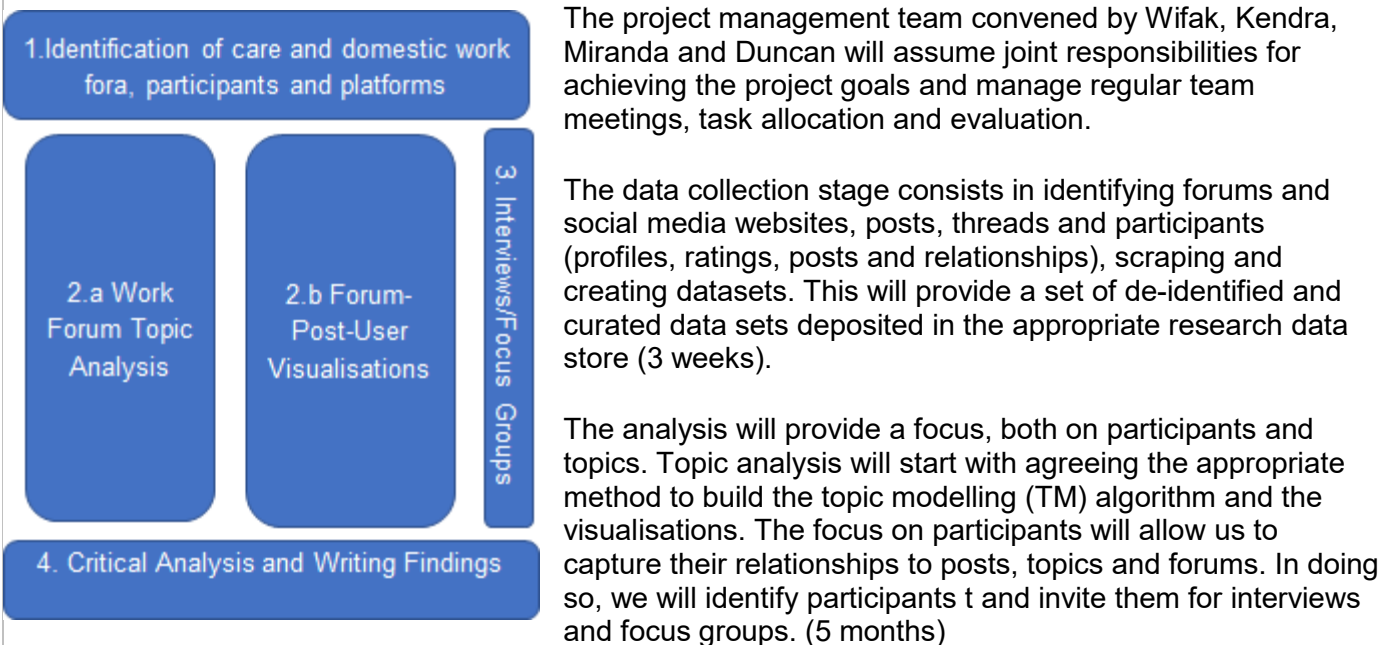
The project will deliver a first explorative and deepened knowledge base with which to inform debate on digital technologies and transformations in the labour market. This will better enable:

- Trade unions and campaigns representing migrant and BAME women or other vulnerable groups in the labour market to resist transformations that will disempower workers
- Policymakers to introduce new regulations to protect workers in these areas and ensure that existing regulatory frameworks are enforced
- Various stakeholders to co-create the next generation of platforms that offer 'decent work'



However, the findings of the proposed research are significant beyond what they reveal about the challenges and opportunities of digital transformations for these specific groups. These transformations need to be understood in the context of not just a 'crisis of work' but also a 'crisis of care' in the context of the erosion of the welfare state through austerity and marketization in a way that forces precarity and financial vulnerability onto individual and isolated workers.

7. WORK PLAN



Writeup and dissemination: this activity will be parallel to the analysis as we run multiple tests on the TM and visualisations to identify topologies of topics, roles, grievances and coping strategies. Findings will be discussed among the members of the research team and between the members and the relevant community (academic and non-academic stakeholders from Trade Unions and NEF partners).

8. HOW WILL YOU COMMUNICATE THE FINDINGS OF YOUR RESEARCH TO THE PUBLIC?

NEF will lead on the dissemination of the project's research findings. They will convene three workshops with representatives from trade unions and campaigning organisations and one policy roundtable to share and discuss findings. These will form the basis of a short, accessible briefing which will be shared with relevant stakeholders.

In addition to this strategy for the targeted dissemination of our findings, NEF's media contacts and wide reach on social media will put us in a strong position to engage a much broader audience and influence public debate. Their research and policy recommendations are regularly covered in popular media outlets (e.g. the FT, the Sunday Times, the Mirror, the Guardian, Sky News).

The specific media outputs for this project have been outlined in section 6.

9. EXISTING FUNDING

The New Economics Foundation have received funding from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust to conduct research on the hierarchies of power that are sustained and amplified by digital technologies in different areas and work with different stakeholders to develop future interventions for a fairer digital economy.

Between May and September this year, the area they will be focussing on is 'womens work' from platforms and online marketplaces to new surveillance technologies and automated hiring. This research will inform the priorities and focus of the Not Equal project starting in September. The network of stakeholders convened as part of the JRCT work will also participate in the workshops for this project.

10. TRACK RECORD OF APPLICANTS 200 EXACTLY NOW!!!

Wifak Gueddana is a teaching fellow in Digital Economy and Society at Kings College London.. Her work on the gig economy has been published in internationally respected journals and her research has received funding from the Network of Excellence in Internet Science and won many awards.

Kendra Briken is a Chancellor's Fellow at the University of Strathclyde. Her work is focussed on critically investigating the management of the employment relationship and new technologies and work with a focus on social justice. She is part of the Scottish Centre for Employment Research (SCER) and her work is always concerned with social justice.

The New Economics Foundation is the UK's leading progressive think tank working to transform the economy so that it works for people and planet. NEF has worked with Uber drivers to build a business plan for an alternative worker-owned ride-hailing platform and convened representatives from trade unions and NGOs to coordinate campaigns in a 'precarious workers forum'..

The project will be supported by **James Stewart** (Lecturer in Science and Technology Studies at the University of Edinburgh), **Rob Procter** (Faculty Fellow of the Alan Turing Institute) and **James Ravenscroft** (the Chief Technologies Officer at a Machine Learning Consultancy called Filament).

11. BUDGET BREAKDOWN

Please provide a detailed budget breakdown and justification for your budget - for example: salary grade, point, duration and %FTE: specified journeys or conferences; identified items and quantities of consumables (<300 words)

Staff costing (King's College)

Directly Incurred

Principal Investigator Wifak Gueddana; Total Number of Hours to be worked 220; Post Start Date 01/09/2019; Post Duration/Months on Project 8; Full Time % 20.00%; Grade and Starting Spine Point Grade 6 / 32

Cost Estimate: £7,137.00

Directly Allocated and Indirect Cost £7,164.00

Cost Estimate £7,352.00

Total Costing £16,092.00

Staff costing (NEF)

Miranda Hall, Researcher (£300 x 23 days = £6,900)

Duncan McCann, Digital Economy Lead (£400 x 23 days = £9,200)

Alice Martin, Head of Work + Pay (£600 x 3 days = £1,800)



Total Costing: £17,900

Project Indirect Costs

Workshops: £2,000

Computational and Software Development Work: £2,500

Travel and consumables: £400

11. TOTAL PROJECT COST

Please list in GBP under the headings - Overall cost, Staff, Travel and Other

| | Directly incurred costs (80%) | Directly incurred costs (100%) |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Staff | £20,030 | £25,037 |
| Non-Staff Costs: Consumables | £320 | £400 |
| Non-Staff Costs: Facilities/Equipment | £2,000 | £2,500 |
| Non-Staff Costs: Travel | £1,600 | £2,000 |
| Non-Staff Costs: Estates (RA's only) | £1,283 | £1,603 |
| Non-Staff Costs: Indirect (RA's only) | £5,881 | £7,352 |
| Overall Cost* | Total Not Equal Funding Requested: £31,114.00 | Total for information only: £38,892.00 |

Directly Incurred Posts

| Role | Post | Start Date | Period on Project (months) | % of Full Time | Scale | Increment Date | Basic Starting Salary | Super-Annuation and NI (£) | Total cost on grant-80% FEC (£) | Total cost on grant-100% FEC (£) |
|--------------------------|------|------------|----------------------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| - Principal Investigator | RA | 01/09/2019 | 8 months | 20% | Grade 6 / 32 | 01/08/2020 | 35,211.00 | 11,506.00 | £5,710 | £7,137 |

*Please note you are able to claim for RA time and RA relevant FTE related costs, PI/Co-I time and other non-staff costs. You are not able to claim for FTE related costs attributed to PI/Co-I time.

Further Information

If you have any further questions regarding this call for proposals, please contact notequal@ncl.ac.uk or Kate Kelly (Not Equal Project Manager) on 0191 2088268.

