



LAW RESEARCH BRIEFING July 2024

Alternative Platform Models for the Domestic Work Sector

Dr Neha Vyas

- ◆ Dr Neha Vyas has been leading a project titled 'Assessing the Potential of Alternative Platform Models for the Domestic Work Sector in South Africa and India' for over a year. The project aims to propose evidence-based legal and policy measures to ensure the long-term sustainability of platform cooperatives in the domestic work sector as a viable alternative to investor-owned platforms.
- ◆ Dr Vyas secured an ESRC Impact Fund (March 2024 - February 2025) to conduct engagement and knowledge exchange activities with academic partners and domestic workers. Hosted by the Centre for Transformative Regulation of Work (CENTROW) at the University of the Western Cape from April 1 to April 16, 2024, she completed the first leg of the project. Activities included a seminar, focus groups with domestic workers in collaboration with the South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union (SADSAWU), and meetings with potential stakeholders.
- ◆ In the seminar, Dr Vyas presented the potential legal challenges of platform cooperatives compared to investor-owned platforms, focusing on issues like network effects, governance models, digital literacy, and infrastructural challenges. The seminar invoked discussions on the intersection of law and economics, the undervaluation of domestic work, and the willingness of domestic workers to be labelled as 'self-employed.' She emphasised the need to use the existing legal framework to ensure 'decent work' for domestic workers instead of proposing a new regulatory framework.
- ◆ The focus group conducted an impact assessment of labour and social security laws in the domestic work sector in South Africa. The project has significantly impacted domestic workers, who discussed issues such as access to the Unemployment Insurance Fund, sexual harassment, wage negotiation, working conditions, childcare infrastructure, spatial segregation, and the position of migrant workers. They highlighted the gap between legal protections and practical implementation, and the bureaucratic hassles in accessing social protection benefits. The limited experience and scepticism of domestic workers regarding digital labour platforms were noted, but perceptions are changing with the platform cooperative project led by some SADSAWU members.
- ◆ The project contributes to public policy by providing constructive, evidence-based recommendations for the legal and policy framework of platform cooperatives. Dr Vyas's engagement with CENTROW and SADSAWU has initiated a dialogue on improving working conditions and ensuring decent work for domestic workers in both traditional and digital labour markets. Her comparative study of labour laws in India and South Africa aims to influence policymakers to adopt best practices and address sector-specific challenges.
- ◆ Dr. Vyas intends to arrange another visit to conduct further engagement activities, track the progress of the Digital Platform Cooperative Project (DPCP), and continue her affiliation with CENTROW as a research associate. The project's commitment to the cause is evident in its future plans, including the publication of a detailed report in March 2025, offering comprehensive insights and recommendations for the sector.



Dr Neha Vyas joined Newcastle University as a Lecturer in Commercial Law in December 2022. She completed her Doctor of Laws at Goethe University, Frankfurt, with a full scholarship from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. Previously, she was an Assistant Professor of Law at Christ University in India, teaching competition law, corporate governance, international taxation, and legal writing. Dr. Vyas is the Principal Investigator for the "Alternative Platform Models for the Domestic Work Sector" project, funded by the ESRC Impact Acceleration Fund (March 2024 - February 2025). She also volunteers as a researcher for the Horizon EU Project, FINDHR, focusing on fairness and non-discrimination in human recommendation systems.

Her research interests include law and technology, regulation of digital labour platforms, competition law and the digital economy, algorithmic discrimination, and women's labour force participation in the gig economy. She holds an LL.M. in Corporate and Commercial Laws, a Postgraduate Diploma in Intellectual Property Law, an LL.B., and a Bachelor of Commerce. She is a member of the Bar Councils of India and Gujarat and the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India and a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.

Dr Vyas is affiliated with the Centre for Transformative Regulation of Work (CENTROW) at the University of the Western Cape, Women in Development Europe+ (Wide+), and the Cornelia Goethe Centre in Frankfurt.

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Related Publication:

Vyas N. Undermining the Role of Women in the Economy: The Interplay Between Paid Work and Unpaid Care Work in India. *Industrial Law Journal* 2022, 51(4), 904-926.

Vyas N. 'Gender Inequality - now available on digital platform': an interplay between gender equality and the gig economy in the European Union. *European Labour Law Journal* 2021, 12(1), 37-51.