

Join a new national network for ethical platform labour research

We are building a UK-wide community of practice for researchers, practitioners, and organisations working on platform labour.

Researching the Hidden Workforce: A National Connective and Capacity-Building Initiative for Platform Labour Studies is a new ESRC-funded project bringing together researchers across sociology, law, human geography, feminist STS, and critical management studies with worker organisations, trade unions, and university ethics bodies. The project runs from c. October 2026 to March 2027.

The field is expanding rapidly but remains fragmented. Researchers across disciplines are independently grappling with the same hard problems around access, consent, and non-extractive engagement with worker organisations, with little shared infrastructure for doing so. This project aims to change that.

We are inviting researchers to join us for:

- Two national workshops (London and Durham, months 2 and 5) bringing together researchers, worker organisation representatives, and institutional ethics officers to map challenges and develop shared principles
- Four participatory ethics labs working through concrete methodological dilemmas — on access and recruitment, informed consent, reciprocity and non-extractive engagement, and researcher safety
- An early career researcher strand including a methods clinic, collaborative writing session, and showcase

Travel bursaries are available. All events will offer hybrid participation, and participants are welcome to attend one or both events.

The ECR strand includes:

- A methods clinic where you can bring live methodological problems from your own research for discussion with experienced researchers and worker organisation partners
- A collaborative writing session producing a co-authored reflection on emerging methodological norms
- A showcase at our final national workshop giving you a supported opportunity to present your work to a cross-sector audience of researchers, practitioners, and worker organisation representatives

The project is led by Professor Helen Hester (UWL) in collaboration with Dr Natalie Sedacca (Durham Law School) and Dr Ulrike Marx (QMUL), with support from the Autonomy Institute.

If you work on platform labour, precarious work, gig economy, care, digital ethnography, feminist methodology, research ethics, or related areas - or if you represent a worker organisation or trade union with an interest in research practice - we want to hear from you.

To register your interest or find out more, please contact: helen.hester@uwl.ac.uk