

JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL STUDIES

**Centre for International Relations
Shaheed Bhagat Singh College
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Call for Papers

Informal Labour and the International Order

International Relations has traditionally approached labour through the lenses of formal employment, organized labour, international labour standards, migration, global production and political economy. Yet a substantial share of the world's workers operates outside, alongside, or at the margins of formal systems of employment, regulation and social protection. Informal labour is therefore not simply a domestic economic phenomenon. It is deeply embedded in global markets, transnational production networks, migration regimes, border economies, development processes and international systems of governance.

The persistence and expansion of informal work raises important questions for International Relations. Who is protected by the international economic order, and who remains outside its institutional protections? How do global value chains depend upon forms of labour that remain invisible or weakly regulated? How do migration regimes produce and sustain informal labour? How do international institutions define, regulate and govern informality? And what can informal labour tell us about the relationship between sovereignty, capitalism and global governance?

This special issue/conference invites scholars to rethink informal labour as an explicitly international and political phenomenon. Rather than treating informality as a residual category or as an absence of formal regulation, we encourage approaches that examine how formal and informal economies are mutually constituted. Existing scholarship has already demonstrated the importance of informalization to global political economy and feminist analysis, while recent work on global value chains has highlighted the limits of existing forms of international labour governance.

We particularly welcome papers that ask how informal labour shapes, and is shaped by, international relations and global structures of power.

POSSIBLE THEMES INCLUDE

Informal Labour and Global Political Economy

How does informal labour contribute to global accumulation and the functioning of international markets? What is the relationship between informalization, neoliberal restructuring and global capitalism? How do global value chains rely upon informal and precarious forms of work?

Borders, Migration and Informal Work

How do migration regimes produce informal labour markets? What happens at the intersection of undocumented migration, temporary migration, citizenship and labour rights? How do border regimes distribute vulnerability and access to work?

Informal Labour and Global Governance

How do the ILO, UN, international financial institutions and other international organizations conceptualize and govern informal labour? Whose definition of "informality" becomes institutionalized, and with what consequences? How do international labour standards reach workers outside formal employment?

Gender, Care and Social Reproduction

How does the international political economy depend upon informal, unpaid and feminized labour? What can domestic work, care work and reproductive labour reveal about global hierarchies of gender, class and race? How might feminist IR help reconceptualize informal labour?

Informal Labour and Global Value Chains

Who bears the costs of global production? How are informal workers positioned within transnational supply chains? What happens when international labour governance encounters workers who fall outside conventional employer-employee relationships?

Platform Work, Digital Economies and Informality

Does the platform economy formalize informal work or generate new forms of informality? How do algorithms, digital platforms and transnational companies reshape the relationship between workers, employers and states?

Development, Informality and the Global South

How have international development institutions understood informal labour? Is informality a developmental problem, a survival strategy, or an integral feature of contemporary capitalism? How might perspectives from the Global South challenge dominant understandings of formalization and development?

Informal Labour and Security

How are informal workers implicated in debates on human security, economic security, food security and social protection? How do crises, conflict, sanctions, pandemics and climate change transform informal labour?

War, Conflict and Informal Economies

How do conflict and political instability transform labour relations? What forms of informal work emerge around war economies, displacement, humanitarian settings and reconstruction?

Informal Labour and the Politics of Sovereignty

What does informal labour reveal about the limits of state sovereignty and territorial governance? How do states simultaneously regulate, tolerate, exploit and depend upon informal labour?

Race, Caste, Coloniality and Informal Labour

How are contemporary forms of informal labour connected to colonial histories and racialized, caste-based and other hierarchical divisions of labour? Can informal labour provide a lens for understanding the persistence of coloniality within the international political economy?

Labour Agency, Resistance and Transnational Mobilization

How do informal workers organize and make political claims in the absence of conventional trade-union structures? What forms of transnational solidarity and political mobilization emerge among informal workers?

Questions for contributions

We particularly encourage papers that move beyond the simple opposition between “formal” and “informal” and instead ask how the two are interconnected. Contributions may engage with questions such as:

- How is informality produced by international economic and political structures?

- Who benefits from the persistence of informal labour?
- How do international institutions define and govern informal workers?
- How do borders and migration regimes create differentiated labour rights?
- Can informal labour be understood as a constitutive feature rather than a marginal feature of the global political economy?
- What does informal labour reveal about the relationship between capitalism, sovereignty and international governance?
- How can theories and methodologies from the Global South reshape the study of labour in International Relations?
- We welcome theoretically informed and empirically grounded contributions from International Relations, International Political Economy, Political Science, Sociology, Development Studies, Labour Studies, Migration Studies, Feminist Political Economy and related fields.
- We particularly encourage submissions that bring together international and everyday levels of analysis and that foreground the experiences, agency and political practices of workers themselves.

Submission

- We invite extended abstracts of approximately 2000 words accompanied by a short biographical note.
- We welcome individual papers as well as proposals for panels or thematic roundtables.
- The organizers particularly encourage submissions from early-career scholars and researchers working on the Global South, as well as interdisciplinary contributions that challenge conventional disciplinary boundaries.
- Please click on the link for [submission guidelines](#).

Important Dates

- Last date for extended abstract submission: 31 October 2026
- Notification of abstract acceptance: 20 November 2026
- Full paper submission deadline: 20 December 2026