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Stream

### **Female-Created Agency in the (In)Formal Labor Market – Displacement, Care, and Empowerment in Africa**

This stream explores forms of agency created by women within formal and informal labor markets, with a particular focus on contexts of migration and displacement in Africa. Special attention is given to women with children, whose scope for action is often constrained by care responsibilities, legal frameworks, economic precarity, and intersecting power relations (Brück et al., 2024; Mutie & Macharia, 2025).

Against the backdrop of current socioeconomic developments that increasingly exacerbate migration and forced displacement, questions of labor market integration and reintegration have gained renewed urgency at both national and transnational levels. Recent research shows that forced displacement disproportionately affects women's access to employment opportunities and reinforces structural disadvantages within labor markets, particularly with regard to care responsibilities, legal status, and economic precarity (Brück et al., 2024). At the same time, policy-oriented analyses point to persistent institutional, political, and socioeconomic barriers that continue to produce unequal labor market outcomes for migrant and displaced populations (Fasani, 2024). In the African context, empirical studies demonstrate how macro-level governance structures, migration legislation, and socioeconomic constraints shape women's access to meaningful employment and reinforce structural exclusion, despite individual strategies aimed at overcoming these barriers (Saurombe, & Zinatsa, 2023; Zinatsa, & Saurombe 2022). Furthermore, research on self-initiated strategies among African migrant women shows that while women actively navigate and negotiate institutional constraints, processes of ethnicization, de-skilling, and restrictive policy regimes continue to hinder full labor market integration. These findings highlight the complex interplay between micro-level agency and macro-structural conditions in the Global South. Building on this body of work, the stream examines how women develop the capacity to navigate, negotiate, and potentially transform existing labor market structures, and how these processes unfold across micro-level dynamics (individual and household contexts) and macro-level conditions (institutional, political, and economic frameworks).

Adopting an intersectional, postcolonial, and critical feminist lens, the stream analyses how inequalities related to gender, migration status, care work, class, and socio-cultural positioning shape access to work, rights, and resources. Particular attention is paid to the negotiation of rights within labor market contexts, the emergence of socio-economic barriers, and the ways in which structural exclusion affects mental health and psychosocial well-being (Mutie, & Macharia, 2025; Shahd, 2024).

The stream invites contributions that critically engage with both challenges and opportunities: Which institutional, organizational, and individual conditions are necessary to enable sustainable income generation? What strategies do women employ to access formal and informal sources of income? How is empowerment understood, enacted, and self-produced under conditions of displacement and uncertainty?

**Possible topics and guiding questions include:**

- How does female-created agency emerge within formal and informal labor markets under conditions of migration and displacement?
- How do women with children navigate structural, legal, and economic constraints at micro and macro levels?
- Which intersectional power relations shape labor market integration and reintegration processes?
- How are rights, recognition, and participation negotiated in work-related contexts?
- What impact do these dynamics have on mental health and psychosocial well-being?
- Which socio-economic barriers persist, and which opportunities can be identified?
- What institutional, organizational, and individual conditions support sustainable income generation?
- What does empowerment mean in this context, and how do women empower themselves?
- In what ways do informal economies, street trading, agriculture, and cross-border micro-trade enable or constrain women's agencies in developing labor markets?
- How do cultural norms, customary institutions, and community power structures influence women's access to work, mobility, and economic decision-making?

The stream welcomes interdisciplinary and methodologically diverse contributions - including papers, symposia, and workshops - that adopt agency-centred perspectives on labor, migration, and gender, and critically reflect on both structural constraints and women's everyday strategies of resilience, negotiation, and transformation.

**References**

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Shahd, A. (2024). The Global Care Chain: Analyzing the Increasing Feminization of Care Work Across Borders. *Social Sciences*, 13(3), 74-80. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ss.20241303.14>

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