

New Work – New Problems? Gender Perspectives on the Transformation of Work. Introduction to the Special Issue

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Abstract: “New Work” practices, accelerated through the Covid-19 pandemic, offer opportunities for gender equity through flexible work arrangements, while they pose risks, especially for those with caregiving duties. This Special Issue features nine contributions from the 2023 conference “New Work – New Problems? Gender Perspectives on the Transformation of Work”. The articles examine remote work through a gender lens, explore evolving gender norms within organizations, and assess whether new work forms lead to dependencies and precarity globally. Collectively, they advocate for rethinking “work” to achieve a more equitable, just, and sustainable future.

Keywords: New work, gender, remote work, platform work, organizational norms

New Work – New Problems? Perspectives de genre sur la transformation du travail. Introduction au dossier thématique

Résumé: Les nouvelles formes d'organisation du travail, promues par la pandémie de Covid-19, offrent des opportunités pour l'égalité des sexes grâce à des modalités de travail flexibles, tout en posant des risques, notamment pour les personnes à qui incombe le travail de care. Ce numéro thématique réunit neuf contributions de la conférence 2023 «New Work – New Problems?». Elles examinent le télétravail sous l'angle du genre, explorent l'évolution des normes de genre au sein des organisations et évaluent si les nouvelles formes de travail entraînent des dépendances et de la précarité à l'échelle mondiale. Collectivement, les articles plaident pour repenser le «travail» afin d'atteindre un avenir plus juste et plus durable.

Mots-clés: New work, genre, travail à distance, travail de plateforme, normes organisationnelles

New Work – New Problems? Geschlechterperspektiven auf den Wandel der Arbeit. Einführung in das Themenheft

Zusammenfassung: «New Work»-Praktiken, beschleunigt durch die Covid-19-Pandemie, bieten Chancen für die Geschlechtergerechtigkeit durch flexible Arbeitsmodelle, bergen jedoch Risiken, insbesondere für Personen mit Betreuungsaufgaben. Dieses Sonderheft präsentiert neun Beiträge der Konferenz 2023 «New Work – New Problems? Geschlechterperspektiven auf die Transformation der Arbeit». Die Artikel untersuchen Telearbeit aus Geschlechterperspektive, erforschen sich wandelnde Geschlechternormen innerhalb von Organisationen und bewerten, ob neue Arbeitsformen weltweit zu Abhängigkeiten und Prekarität führen. Gemeinsam plädieren sie dafür, «Arbeit» neu zu denken, um eine gerechte und nachhaltige Zukunft zu erreichen.

Schlüsselwörter: Neue Arbeit, Geschlecht, Tele-Arbeit, Plattformarbeit, organisationale Normen

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1 Background¹

1.1 The Transformation of Work at the Intersection of Gender

Feminist scholars have long challenged conventional definitions of work, emphasizing the need of recognizing unpaid care work and domestic labor as essential components of economic systems and social reproduction (Federici, 1975). Building on this tradition, we define work in this introduction as encompassing both paid work (also referred to as occupation, employment, or job) and unpaid work (such as care and domestic work; Fuchs et al., 2021). At the same time, it is crucial to acknowledge that capitalist societies remain heavily centered and dependent on employment. In such systems, the job market plays a crucial role, not only in state budgets, stable social security systems, and ensuring economic livelihoods, but also in shaping social exclusion e.g. between those with (well-paid) jobs and those without (Piketty, 2020). In this logic of paid work an “ideal worker” model rooted in full-time male employment is deeply inherent (Acker, 1990).

Against this background, the concept of “New Work”, as articulated by Frithjof Bergmann (2019), challenges this traditional model by advocating a shift toward paid work that prioritizes employees’ well-being, meaning, and satisfaction – both in the workplace and beyond. A fundamental aspect of this concept is the empowerment of individuals to engage in occupations that align with their personal values and interests while also contributing to more sustainable pathways that offers an alternative to exhaustion, burnout, and the exploitation of oneself and others. Achieving this requires a comprehensive restructuring of employment systems to provide individuals with the necessary autonomy and resources.

In this context, technology is envisioned as a tool to automate mundane or repetitive tasks, thereby liberating individuals to engage in more meaningful pursuits and devoting more time to unpaid care work or civic engagement (Bücker, 2022; Fraser, 2022). Furthermore, this transition is predicated on a re-evaluation of economic models to support such transformations and pave the path for a more just society. However, while paid work is undergoing profound transformations, the current development is fragmented and has led to mixed outcomes. On the one hand, self-organization and flexible working patterns are becoming more prevalent leading to a degree of optimism and more autonomy, however, also stress and self-exploitation are on the rise. On the other hand, many employees continue to face

1 Many thanks to Martina Peitz, Eva Granwehr, and all members of the scientific and organizational committee of the conference “New Work – New Problems”, organized by the Gender Studies Committee of the Swiss Sociological Association and the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, which took place in September 2023 in Lucerne. At the conference, we welcomed over 40 presentations from around the world (see Heidl, 2023; <https://www.hslu.ch/de-ch/soziale-arbeit/agenda/veranstaltungen/2023/09/07/new-work-2023/>, 27.01.2025).

precarious conditions which starkly contrast with the ideals of “New Work” (see articles in this special issue; Hardering, 2021; Schwiter & Steiner, 2020). It is thus important to keep in mind that specific social power relations shape the concrete prospects for a more just development (Fuchs & Graf, 2019).

Moreover, the core principles of “New Work” and the above-described transformations of paid work are closely tied to gender relations, as employment systems often reinforce gendered inequalities, and maintain the gender order (Acker, 1990; Connell, 1987, Zinn & Hofmeister, 2022), thereby limiting the potential for a full and equal inclusion of all individuals. By critiquing systems that devalue unpaid care work – still largely performed by women – and emphasizing self-determined employment, “New Work” may encourage a redistribution of responsibilities and opportunities across genders. However, most studies so far fail to fully address the broader implications of flexibilization and digital transformation on gender relations, particularly in the division between paid labor and unpaid care work.

Some research has explored the ambivalent effects of digitalization, noting that it offers both opportunities and challenges for gender equity, shaping career paths, caregiving roles, and workplace dynamics (Kutzner & Schnier, 2017). While the digital transformation can challenge stereotypes, it often reinforces outdated norms and structural inequalities (Hardering, 2020). For example, digital tools that promote flexible occupational arrangements are often heralded as facilitating more egalitarian workplace cultures. Yet, these tools frequently fail to address deeper, systemic issues, such as the persistent “gender time gap” in unpaid care work (Huws, 2019; Kümmerling et al., 2015). In addition, digitalization can lead to blurred boundaries between employment and personal life which increases stress, introduce health risks, and disproportionately impact women, who are more likely to shoulder unpaid domestic labor (Bornatici & Zinn, 2025; Fuchs et al., 2021; Lanfranconi et al., 2019). Despite hopes for decentralized decision-making and participatory collaboration enabled by digital tools, persistent gendered expectations around availability and commitment often undermine these possibilities (Huws, 2019). Women face significant challenges under flexible conditions, which demand long hours and constant availability. These expectations perpetuate the “ideal worker” (Acker, 1990). Part-time employment, predominantly held by women to accommodate caregiving, continue to hinder career advancement, and reinforces occupational segregation (Scheele, 2018).

This makes it clear that while digital transformation and flexibilization have the potential for more egalitarian paid and unpaid work practices, they often fail to do so due to structural inequalities and entrenched gender norms. The lack of sufficient empirical research further limits our understanding of how these shifts impact work-life balance, caregiving responsibilities, and career trajectories.

1.2 The Covid-19 Pandemic as a Transformation Catalyst: Gender, Caregiver, and Global Inequalities

While the above-described labor market transformations took place over the last decades with various speeds depending on the country context, the Covid-19 pandemic acted worldwide as a catalyst for the flexibilization of employment, rapidly transforming working conditions and structures. Flexible occupational arrangements – such as more flexibility in terms of time and place – were implemented almost overnight, creating opportunities for greater autonomy, balancing employment and personal life. However, the challenges associated with this rapid “flexibilization” were also significant, often leading to higher workloads, employer demands for constant availability, and work-life blending. During the pandemic schools and care institutions in many countries remained closed creating a significant gap in care work that had to be filled (Lanfranconi et al., 2021). In this context, a key question concerns the implications of these rapid, pandemic-induced transformations for gender equality.

The consequences of the pandemic from a gender perspective have been ambiguous. For example, European studies indicated gendered concerns, with women especially worried about childcare and men about paid work (Czymara et al., 2020; Eurofound, 2022; OECD, 2021) and increased mental health problems among women (Daly et al., 2022). Swiss studies showed that while men living in households with children became more engaged in unpaid work during the pandemic, women with children were disproportionately more affected by additional care work (Bütikofer et al., 2020; Lanfranconi et al., 2021; Steinmetz et al., 2022). Overall, the existing (gender) inequalities in paid and unpaid work have been reinforced and the gap widened, with single parents and caregivers for children or dependent adults being most impacted by lockdowns and quarantines (Fuchs et al., 2021).

Further research showed that this increased burden contributed, particularly for women, to higher levels of stress (Kuhn et al., 2021), mental health challenges, and with long-term implications for career advancement and earnings (Bahn et al., 2020; Ballif & Zinn, 2023). On a more structural level, women were disproportionately affected by job losses and reduced working hours, particularly in sectors like retail, hospitality, and caregiving, which employ a high proportion of women and were heavily impacted by lockdowns. For instance, studies from multiple countries highlighted that women were more likely than men to be employed in jobs considered non-essential but customer-facing, resulting in higher unemployment rates for women during the early stages of the pandemic. Conversely, many women in essential roles, such as healthcare and education, faced heightened exposure to the virus and increased workloads (Kabeer et al., 2021; Paz Nieves et al., 2021).

Yet, on the global scale, the Covid-19 pandemic has – again with some ambiguous effects – revealed and reinforced dependencies, hierarchies, and the privileges of the Global North. The increase in global inequality and poverty was largest in 2020 since at least 1990 (Mahler et al., 2022). Supply chain disruptions, such as short-

ages of protective materials, highlighted these inequalities, as did the breakdown of global care chains. For instance, border closures interrupted shuttle migration of live-in caregivers from Eastern Europe to German-speaking countries (Schwiter & Steiner, 2021). These shifts in the global division of employment and migration regimes are deeply structured by gender and other dimensions of inequality (Seminario, 2021; Sproll, 2020).

The pandemic also accelerated the proliferation of remote work on a global scale. Jobs that once required physical presence have increasingly become “anywhere jobs”, decoupled from geographical constraints. While these opportunities were previously reserved for a small segment of highly skilled workers, the normalization of remote work has expanded the potential for outsourcing tasks to countries in the Global South. This shift raises critical questions about its impact on labor markets and gender relations (Kakkad et al., 2021). Moreover, the digital divide significantly shaped women’s experiences of the pandemic. Limited access to technology and digital skills among women, especially in low-income and rural areas, constrained their ability to participate in remote work, access online services, and engage in digital learning opportunities (Mathrani et al., 2023; UN Women, 2022; UNESCO, 2022). The implication of the global outsourcing of jobs enabled by remote work, remain underexplored, as it could entrench new forms of labor exploitation in the Global South, disproportionately affecting women workers. These dynamics demand further investigation to ensure that the expansion of remote work contributes to more equitable labor markets and does not exacerbate existing inequalities.

1.3 The Role of Work-Gender Policies

The concept of “New Work” holds the potential to promote fairer living conditions and greater gender justice by challenging traditional employment structures and expanding the understanding of work beyond paid labor. Recent data from Switzerland demonstrate strong public support for increased recognition and remuneration of unpaid care work, as well as paid parental leave (Fuchs et al., 2021). These demands echo longstanding feminist critiques of the narrow definition of work (Méda, 2019) and call for a broader perspective of work that includes unpaid care and civic engagement.

The Covid-19 pandemic has intensified debates about these labor transformations, exposing structural inequalities and the essential role of care work. Recognizing care work as fundamental has underscored capitalism’s dependence on unpaid and underpaid labor, reinforcing the gendered division of work (Federici, 1975; Wichterich, 2021). This awareness raises critical questions: Will these shifts lead to emancipatory change, or will they exacerbate precarity, exploitation, and occupational intensification? The answer depends on political processes and the policies that emerge in response to these transformations. As Himmelweit and Plomien (2014) argue, care and its gendered provision remain a key feminist concern, and

the unequal distribution of care labor reflects and reinforces broader structural inequalities, as highlighted by social reproduction theory and Black and decolonial critiques (Beier et al., 2023).

The pandemic indeed revealed the urgent need for social security reforms, as the “standard employment relationship” (Hardering, 2020) continues to decline and hybrid employment models like platform work expand. Governments demonstrated strong capacities and willingness to provide income security during the crisis, but disparities in resources led to uneven protections across and within countries (Kabeer et al., 2021). A notable example is the expansion of short-time work compensation, which helped stabilize labor markets. In Switzerland, these policies were relatively inclusive, offering greater support to lower earners and covering non-standard employment categories such as the self-employed, part-time, fixed-term, and domestic workers (Pärli et al., 2023). In some cases, these policies acknowledged childcare responsibilities as grounds for income compensation, and short-time work allowances even extended to reduced working hours – all measures that disproportionately benefited women (see Cook & Grimshaw, 2021, for EU countries).

However, new employment models, such as platform work, continue to pose challenges. Research confirms that women in platform work face heightened precarity, low wages, and discrimination. Comparative studies between Germany and the U.S. indicate that institutional differences significantly influence how welfare policies mitigate or exacerbate insecurity and precarity (Gerber, 2022). Regulation and policy design are crucial in shaping employment conditions, yet they are informed by gender stereotypes, problem definitions (cf. Bacchi, 1999), and political discourses on the relationship between state and economy. The details of policy implementation – who is included, who is excluded – are critical in determining whether new policies foster fair employment.

Overall, there is an urgent need to systematically integrate a gender perspective into analyses of work transformations, in the context of the pandemic, at the local, organizational, and global level. With this Special Issue, based on the 2023 conference “New Work – New Problems? Gender Perspectives on the Transformation of Work”, organized by the Gender Studies committee of the Swiss Sociological Association and the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences, we aim to address some of these gaps and shortcomings.

2 Contributions of the Special Issue

The special issue seeks to address these gaps by examining how changes in work forms and conditions affect the compatibility of paid employment with unpaid care work, the division of labor between genders, and evolving gender norms. It brings together nine contributions organized into three overarching themes. The

first three contributions focus on remote work through a gender lens. The second set of articles examines the transformation of gendered norms at the organizational level, exploring how these shifts affect workplace practices and policies. The final three contributions adopt a global perspective, investigating whether new forms of work create new dependencies and forms of precarity.

2.1 The Gendered Impacts of Remote Work

These three contributions examine a specific form of “New Work” that expanded during the pandemic, namely remote work.

Regine Graml and Veronika Kneip focus on the gender-specific effects of working from home on careers. Their systematic literature review shows that career prospects for remote workers are influenced by stereotypes and stigmas, particularly affecting women (with and without children), and fathers. They conclude that the impact of working from home is contingent on an organization’s formal or informal culture and its adherence to the ideal worker norm. Based on these findings, they propose a phased model of structural and cultural change. The model emphasizes that a more formal organization of employment and cultural shifts towards greater work autonomy and employer’s trust, with clear processes and communication, can help narrow the gender gap in remote work settings.

Anja Abendroth, Yvonne Lott, Lena Hipp, Sandra Dummert, and Tanja Carstensen introduce the concept of “digital presence behavior” to describe how employees establish “presence” without being on-site. This encompasses digital availability, visibility, multitasking, and participation. Analysis of data from remote workers highlights the ambivalence and inequalities associated with digital technologies. The analysis reveals that men tended to be more digitally available than women, while mothers prioritized digital visibility and fathers frequently engaged in digital multitasking. Moreover, the persistent expectation of constant digital availability reflects the ongoing idealization of the “ideal worker” – always accessible and prioritizing employment – even in the digital era.

Jana Z’Rotz, Timo Ohnmacht, and Patrick Rérat examine the impact of gender differences in teleworking on daily mobility. Based on a cross-sectional survey, the study reveals that women and men differ in their attitudes toward teleworking and in how they utilize the time saved from commuting. The findings indicate that frequent teleworkers tend to have longer commutes, particularly men. Women prioritize efficiency and minimal disruption while teleworking, whereas men report greater challenges with distractions, self-discipline, and motivation. Parental status often amplifies these gender-based differences.

Overall, the three contributions reveal that “old problems”, such as the unequal distribution of household tasks, the “ideal worker” norm, and flexibility stigma, persist in remote work settings, reproducing gender inequalities. However,

they also identify opportunities for teleworking to reduce inequalities and highlight how working from home can benefit gender equality when implemented under the right conditions.

2.2 Reproduction or Re-Construction of Gender Norms on an Organizational Level

The following three contributions examine the opportunities and risks of “New Work” during the pandemic, focusing primarily on the organizational level.

Lucia M. Lanfranconi's contribution is based on an online survey of 31 family-friendly employers in two Swiss regions during spring 2021 on organizational responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. Many of these employers benefited from pre-existing family-friendly practices in crisis management. However, a contradiction emerges: while caregivers were recognized as disproportionately affected, women and mothers bore the greatest challenges but were not explicitly acknowledged as more impacted. By adopting a gender-blind, equal-treatment approach, these employers unintentionally exacerbated gender inequalities, shifting the burden to caregivers – predominantly mothers – while failing to take responsibility for addressing these disparities.

Hanna Haag and Markus Gamper investigate how fathers in academia navigate care work within the meritocratic performance system of science. Using qualitative data from two studies on the pandemic's effects at German universities, they show that the Covid-19 crisis prompted some fathers to challenge heteronormative expectations of scientific identities. These experiences led to new caregiving practices and a reimagined self-image as “caring scientists”, highlighting the potential for transformation in academic working conditions.

Alexandra Wrška explores gender dynamics in collaborative workspaces in rural Austria, using ethnographic research from two organizations, including one focused on women. Interviews with users, managers, and operators reveal how organizational structures and workspace design influence gender (in)equality. The study underscores the potential of collaborative workspaces to serve as inclusive environments that address the specific needs and challenges of women in non-urban areas, while also identifying mechanisms through which inequality can persist or be reduced.

Overall, the contributions show how the pandemic created opportunities to rethink and renegotiate organizational structures and cultures. For example, during the pandemic employers recognized rising care inequalities, although often through a gender-blind approach, fathers in academia adopted new caregiving roles, and collaborative workspaces emerged as potential egalitarian work environments. However, these studies also reveal significant risks. As long as societal structures remain shaped by gender inequalities, and care work continues to be undervalued, achieving genuine equity for women and caregivers – regardless of gender – will remain a challenge. Collectively, they underline the critical need to address gender

norms and care inequalities within the evolving framework of “New Work”. While some progress has been made, meaningful structural and cultural changes are essential to create truly inclusive and equitable workplaces.

2.3 Global Perspectives: New Work – New Dependencies and Precarity

The final three contributions adopt a global perspective, focusing on precarious working conditions.

Lisa Katharina Stalder uses critical frame analysis to examine diverse policy documents from Swiss cantons on the regulation of sex work. She demonstrates that problem definitions and proposed solutions primarily focus on traditional forms of sex work associated with migrant women. Recent changes, such as digitalization, shifting mobility regimes, and evolving norms, are largely overlooked. Moreover, the discourse fails to adequately address the risks of exploitation. Precarity remains high due to limited regulation and the absence of labor rights for mobile migrant sex workers. As a result, the concept of sex work as “New work” – work that benefits the worker – appears hardly feasible.

Romina Cutuli, Inés Pérez, and Débora Garazi evaluate the *registradas* scheme to include the mostly informal domestic workers in the social security and protection system in Argentina. It² targeted the sector after the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsidized the employment of domestic workers by middle-income employers. The analysis, supported by document analysis and expert interview, shows that three out of four workers continue to lack social protection. Thus, the program has little impact on gender equality in employment.

Aashika Ravi analyzes the experiences of women in India working for location-based digital platforms such as Uber. Based on narrative interviews, the study reveals a heightened risk of sexist and sexual violence, exacerbated by the inherent irresponsibility of the platforms. Information asymmetries and non-transparent algorithms make female workers, who rely on flexibility, particularly vulnerable. Ravi attributes this situation to underlying neoliberal ideals of freedom and entrepreneurship, as well as a techno-masculinist notion of flexibility embedded in the functioning of these platforms.

From different perspectives, these three contributions highlight that “New work” – defined as employment that serves workers’ needs and aspirations – requires regulation. As Stalder (in this issue, p. 148) explains, state intervention can promote the structural conditions for meaningful work and strengthen workers’ possibilities to make autonomous choices. For instance, sex workers need enforceable rights, platform workers require effective protection from sexual violence, and domestic workers need social citizenship. None of these protections will emerge automatically from new forms of employment.

2 *Registradas* refer to the objective of the scheme, namely, to newly register more domestic workers.

3 Key Insights and Recommendations from the Special Issue³

Overall, the contributions of the special issue underscore the complex relationship between evolving work forms and persistent gender inequalities. In the following we highlight the key insights and lessons learned at the individual, organizational, and societal level.

At the *individual level* several contributions to this special issue underscore the importance of *promoting flexible and hybrid occupational arrangements* to accommodate diverse employee's needs. These measures not only help avoid rigid mandates for office presence but also leverage the strengths of various employment environments to enhance inclusion and efficiency (Z'Rotz et al., in this issue). Flexible arrangements, such as remote and hybrid work, are particularly valuable in addressing the diverse responsibilities of employees, including caregiving. While digital tools can enhance visibility and participation for caregivers, they also risk blurring work-life boundaries, thereby increasing stress. The challenge of balancing digital availability and multitasking – experienced acutely by fathers and mothers – illustrates the persistence of the “ideal worker” norm in the digital age (Abendroth et al., in this issue). Hybrid employment models should therefore strike a balance between in-office and remote work, tailored to diverse employee needs. Research shows that greater autonomy over occupational content, time, and location correlates with improved work-life balance (for an overview see Lanfranconi et al., 2019).

To further promote equity, *traditional performance indicators, such as “face time”, should be avoided*. Instead, organizations should align personnel development, evaluation, and communication systems to recognize achievements in a way that supports underrepresented groups. For example, structured processes for presenting results can enhance visibility for women, who are often overlooked in informal workplace dynamics (Abendroth et al., in this issue).

The pandemic highlighted the *need for greater support for men in caregiving roles* while creating opportunities to challenge the long-standing “omni-availability” norm that ties professional success to total dedication to paid work (Haag & Gamper, in this issue). These shifts at the individual level, however, could foster broader cultural change, promoting a more equitable distribution of caregiving responsibilities within organizations and society. To capitalize on these moments of change, in particular organizations should actively support and normalize men's involvement in caregiving which can help dismantle traditional gender roles and promote a more balanced approach to caregiving responsibilities across genders fostering a more inclusive workplace.

At the *organizational level* the Covid-19 pandemic exposed the urgent need for a *redefinition of the “ideal worker” norm and greater gender-consciousness* within

³ For a short German version of practical recommendations at the company level of the overall conference “New Work – New Problems”, see Heidl (2023).

organizations. Several contributions highlight how the persistence of this outdated norm continues to reproduce gender inequalities, also in emerging employment models like remote work (Abendroth et al., in this issue; Graml & Kneip, in this issue). Lanfranconi (in this issue) further demonstrates that gender-blind equal-treatment norms at the organizational level exacerbated preexisting inequalities in organizations during the pandemic. These findings emphasize the importance of shifting from a gender-blind equality approach to a gender-conscious equity approach in organizational policies and decision-making. Practically, this requires acknowledging the gendered realities of unpaid care work to prevent the perpetuation of inequalities. Organizations must also redefine the “ideal worker” in line with Bergmann’s (2019) concept of “New Work”, which prioritizes employee well-being, meaningful engagement, and job satisfaction over rigid, traditional productivity metrics.

A further key lesson from the pandemic is that organizations must *initiate cultural and structural changes*. While accelerated digitalization has enabled flexible work arrangements, such as remote work, flexibility alone is insufficient to achieve gender equity. Without accompanying cultural changes, flexibility stigmas persist, particularly for women, who are often perceived as less committed due to caregiving responsibilities. Moreover, to address these barriers, structural changes like remote work must be combined with cultural shifts that dismantle the outdated “ideal worker” stereotype. Organizations should adopt a holistic employee model that values diverse roles and contributions from various life areas, fostering motivation, health, and inclusivity (Graml & Kneip, in this issue; Haag & Gamper, in this issue).

On a more concrete level, *inclusively designed collaborative workspaces* hold the potential to serve as egalitarian environments and alternative workplaces for women, particularly in non-urban areas. When designed thoughtfully, such spaces can address the specific needs of female knowledge workers, enabling them to thrive in equitable and supportive environments (Wrbka in this issue). However, it is essential to recognize that they are not a panacea for workplace inequalities. Structural challenges such as gender gaps and societal expectations continue to shape women’s professional experiences. To maximize their potential, workspaces must prioritize flexibility, security, personal development, and networking opportunities. A deliberate and inclusive approach to designing collaborative workspaces can help bridge existing gaps and empower women in both urban and rural contexts.

Finally, achieving gender equity following the ideal of “New Work” would also require *targeted societal interventions*. These interventions must address systemic inequalities in caregiving responsibilities, legal protections, and worker representation to ensure equitable outcomes for all genders. More concretely, a core finding of the special issue is that societies need to invest *in family policies and childcare*. Addressing the unequal distribution of housework and caregiving responsibilities is critical to preventing remote work and other flexible employment arrangements from reinforcing traditional gender roles. Structural and cultural changes are essential to

achieve equitable outcomes for all employees, regardless of gender (Lanfranconi, in this issue; Z'Rotz et al., in this issue). Robust family policies, including affordable childcare for both preschool and school-aged children, as well as equal parental leave for mothers and fathers, are key to reducing the disproportionate caregiving burden on women and encourage shared responsibilities within households. Investment in these areas can help ensure that remote work arrangements support rather than hinder gender equity (Lanfranconi, in this issue).

Furthermore, the rise of informal work and new employment models, such as shuttle migration and platform-based labor, has shifted risks and responsibilities onto workers while leaving profits and decision-making power with employers or platform owners. *Legal regulations and their enforcement* are therefore essential to protecting workers' rights and fostering equitable opportunities, as demonstrated by three contributions in this issue (Stalder, in this issue; Cutuli et al., in this issue; Ravi, in this issue). In this context, policy makers must consider prospective gender impacts when drafting inclusive legislation, particularly given the vulnerabilities associated with informal and platform work. Emerging forms of labor organization and worker representation in these sectors, while promising, remain largely ungendered in research and policy discussions (Dasgupta et al., 2024). For example, prospects for effective regulation might differ between regions in the Global South, where informal work is widespread, and countries like Switzerland, where subsequent rulings of the Federal Supreme Court classified Uber as an employer in several cantons (Pärli, 2023). National labor market regimes and gender regimes also shape the effectiveness of regulation, requiring tailored approaches that take these variations into account (Ametowobla & Kirchner, 2024).

A final aspect of the increasing necessity for *worker empowerment in informal and platform-based work* is the crucial role played by (grassroots) organizations, trade unions, and other forms of collective action. These entities are essential for improving working conditions and providing self-protection for workers in these sectors. (Ravi, in this issue; Cutuli et al., in this issue; Poblete, 2022). An emerging alternative, platform cooperativism, offers a promising model for worker empowerment, though it faces structural tensions between platform and cooperative work models (Mannan & Pek, 2024). However, these challenges should not deter efforts to explore and support alternative organizational models. Instead, they should inspire political and practical strategies to strengthen collective worker representation and ensure that emerging forms of labor organizing address gender disparities. Researchers and political actors alike must engage in fostering gender-sensitive approaches to representation and policy advocacy (cf. Salvagni et al., 2022).

Overall, the contributions of this special issue highlight the need to seize the opportunity presented by the concept of "New Work", amplified by the pandemic, to fundamentally rethink "work" at the individual, organizational, political, and societal levels.

4 Perspectives

The pandemic has intensified discussions on the transition to a post-capitalist and post-growth society (Méda, 2019; Steinberger, 2020). The crisis moment has highlighted the urgency of rethinking labor structures from a feminist perspective – one that centers on social justice, challenges the invisibility of unpaid work, and questions the primacy of wage labor as the defining metric of economic and personal worth. Yet, as of 2025, heightened awareness of these issues has not translated into profound socio-political or ecological transformations beyond the paradigm of endless growth. As shown in this issue the ideal worker norm continues to dominate also during the pandemic (Abendroth et al.; Graml & Kneip; Lanfranconi) and thus to obscure its reliance on care work and the natural environment (Fraser, 2016; Scholz & Heilmann, 2018).

Working time reduction could offer a concrete strategy for disrupting these exploitative dynamics. Reducing working hours has long been a feminist demand, that not only has the potential to facilitate a more equitable division of care responsibilities but also promote well-being and social participation beyond market productivity (Beck, 2000; Fraser, 2013). A reduced working time is crucial for environmental sustainability, as excessive labor fuels consumerism and resource depletion (Antal et al., 2021).

These necessary transformations resonate with Bergmann's (2019) vision of "New Work", which sought to transcend the crises generated by our current modes of working and living. While often overlooked, his approach aligns with feminist critiques of wage labor (Fraser 2013; 2016; Young, 1988), envisioning a future where work prioritizes self-determination, collective well-being, and ecological balance, ensuring the stability and health of ecosystems over time. As feminist scholars have long argued, truly transformative labor models must center those who have historically been excluded from economic decision-making, ensuring that future work structures are not only more inclusive but also capable of fostering a just and sustainable world within planetary boundaries.

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